著作権保護コンテンツ



01 夢みる蛍

有井赤平

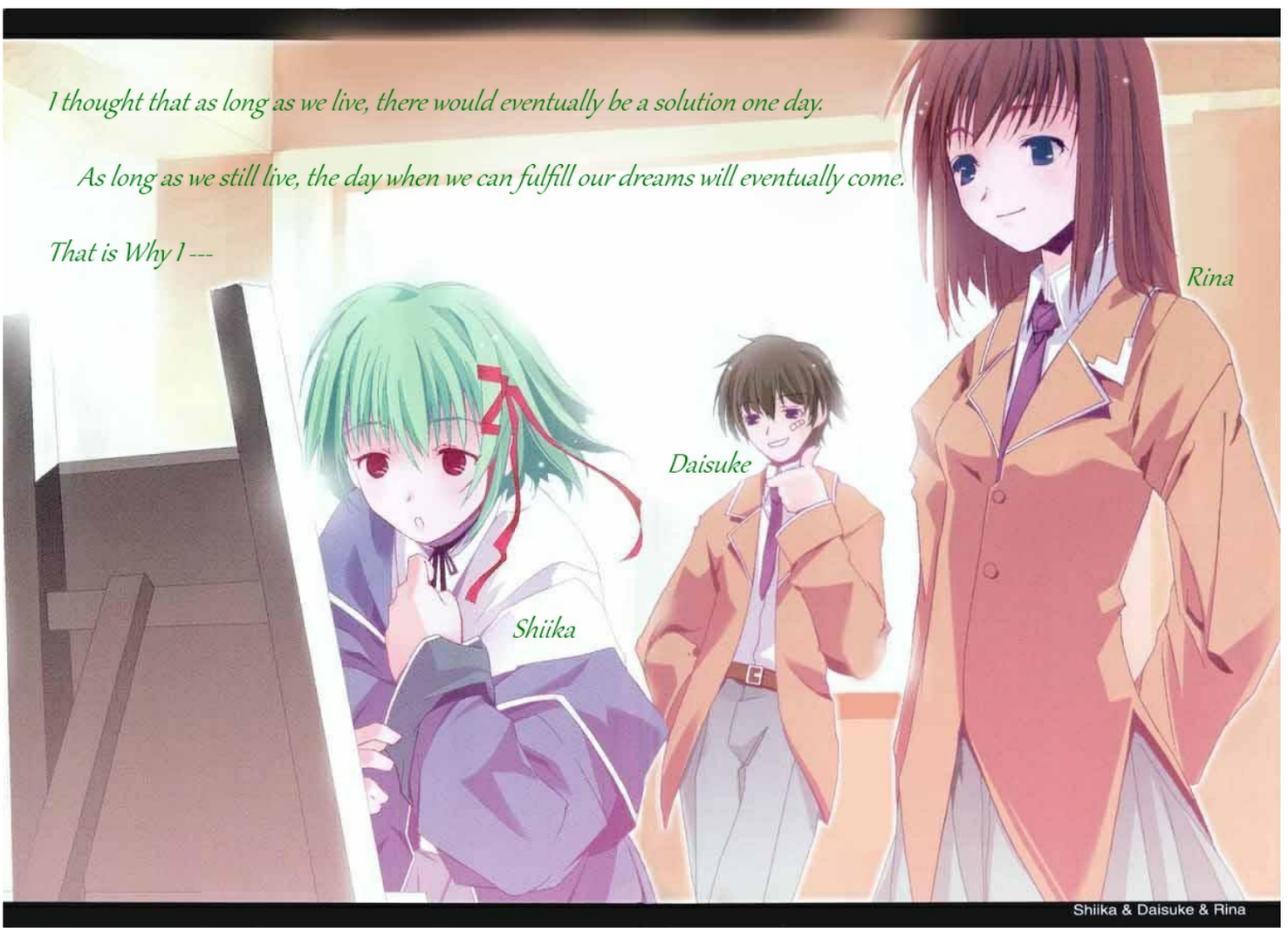
Kyohei Iwai

ムシウタ

MUSHIUTA

角川スニーカー文庫

「著作権保護コンテンツ」


I thought that as long as we live, there would eventually be a solution one day.
As long as we still live, the day when we can fulfill our dreams will eventually come.
That is Why I ---
Rina
Daisuke
Shiika
Shiika & Daisuke & Rina


Keigo
Kakkou
MinMin
Why must we sacrifice ourselves just for the reason of "For the Country"?
I am going to slaughter you.....
As long as the SEPB is eliminated, we Mushitsuki will finally be able to find the place we belong!
I am definitely going to kill you !!!
Keigo & Kakkou & Minmin


If I knew it was going to
turn out like this...
Daisuke
Shiika
I should have
never met you...
Shiika & Daisuke



It seems that you're still alive huh...? "Kakkou"

Ume & Harukiyo

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Terms Corner

Mushi: Japanese translation for insect/bug.

Mushitsuki: The host who are infested by the Mushi, they are mainly teenagers.

Fallen: Host that had their Mushi killed will become Fallen, becoming lifeless puppet/zombie.

SEPB: Also known as the Special Environmental Preservation Bureau. A top secret agency that deploy Mushitsuki to catch or eliminate other Mushitsuki.

Prologue Chapter 0.00: The Others

Everybody had the same look in their eyes.

The bystanders walked on the streets under the morning sun, moving towards their own respective destinations — a common sight in the city that was not out of the norm. However, it lacked realism in the scenario. Mainly due to the lifeless pupils, akin to glass beads, that they possessed, which made them look like a large number of empty dolls walking about.

— Looked to the side —

Through the window of a Café, a girl with artificial-looking eyes could be seen. The girl was in her teens, fashioned with a shortly trimmed hairstyle. The teenage girl didn't seem to realize that the figure reflected by the window was her own in reality.

Diverting her gaze away from the window, she continued walking.

There was no need for her to think about where to go or where she came from, because any self-consciousness was unneeded "here".

On the wall that she passed by, there was a large graffiti written on top.

[East - 33 GARDEN]

The teenage girl came to a halt.

Across the street, a train station could be seen.

She was unsure of the reason why she suddenly stopped… if she remembered correctly; she needs to turn right here...

However, she felt a tight pain in her chest… As she stared beyond the station — at the sky that was brightened slowly by the morning sun.

Even though the teenage girl was unable to think of anything that could be in that direction, she still fixed her gaze at certain point of the horizon— not wavering in the slightest.

"During these four years……"

A voice suddenly sounded behind her.

When the teenage girl turned around, a tall lady was already there. The perfectly round sunglasses on her face, and the deep red coat that she was wearing, were shining brightly under the reflection of the sun's rays.

She could feel the running pain in her chest once again.

This lady in front of her was definitely someone that she knew…… Yet, she could not remember when or where they had met before, nor did she intend on recalling it as well.

The lady lowered her head to look at the teenage girl, and said while smiling: "During this four year period, have you always been like this? Without thinking about anything, and without wishing for anything … …"

She stroked the chin of the teenage girl with her red leather gloved hand.

"I see… Such a waste, your dream was just too delicious. However, it's alright, because you will definitely recall it straightaway right?"

A light sound echoed by the teenage girl's side.

Shifting her gaze, she noticed a strange looking figure was standing amidst a crowd of students and salarymen. Judging from the body figure, the person seemed to be female. She was wearing huge goggles that covered half of her face and a dark-black long coat.

"Hey, what're you doing over there?"

The goggled figure stepped forward towards the teenage girl; however her question was not directed towards the teenage girl, but to the lady besides her.

The dark red lady released the teenage girl's hand.

"A Special Environmental Preservation Bureau watcher, hmm? Are you the one in charge of this child here?"

"I'm the one asking the questions here. If you do not step away from that girl, or follow my orders…."

Just then, a butterfly appeared out of nowhere and landed on the shoulder of the goggled figure. It was a butterfly that had a pair of snow white wings.

“Oh my, your (Mushi) had also this form? What a …… coincidence!”

“… What do you mean by that?”

Averting her gaze away from the doubtful female goggled figure, the woman faced the teenage girl and said: “The things you wanted to do, the places you wanted to go, now you can act according to your feelings. The next time we meet, would you tell me your dream again?”

In the teenage girl’s eyes, feelings began to surge through… Although she didn’t understand what the sunglasses woman was talking about, she could feel an unknown force pushing herself…

“Damn you……what on earth are you!”

The foot of the goggled figure that was stepping forward, suddenly stopped moving.

The lady with the perfectly round sunglasses stuck out her hand. At the tip of her fingers, a butterfly covered in a colorful pattern landed.

Shocked, the goggled figure immediately froze.

“That (Mushi) ……!! It can’t be true! You are (Oogui) …?!”

"It seems that you have a dream that is rather delicious as well, hmm?"

The butterfly on the fingertips of the lady suddenly began to morph. Accompanied by the sound of constant cracking; its beautiful wings started growing in size.

“Hey, could you tell me your dream as well?”

Chapter 1.00: Daisuke Part 1

During a morning of December, when the air was so cold that it was painful to breathe.

Every time I stand here at this train platform I can’t help but wonder; even though we have entered the 21st century for quite a few years already, they still haven't changed the platform to an enclosed structure with a built-in heater. Wouldn't it be much better if they did that? Well, regarding the doors at the railway platform. As long as they wait for the train to stop at the correct place, and then open like those automatic doorways, it should do the job.

The time was just nice, 7:30.

Kusuriya Daisuke, just as usual, crossed the ticketing gate.

The railway platform was just like usual; always packed with people, with passengers preparing to head to school— thus making the place very lively. Among this crowd, there was a group of teenage girls wearing blazers that were making more noise than the other passengers. They stood near the ticketing gate, almost as if it was their usual spot.

Among the four teenagers, the girl in the center of the crowd was the most eye-catching: Her long hair, which reached her shoulders, shimmered brightly from the reflection of the morning sun; the smile on her face made her stand out even further amongst the crowd. Yet, her smile made her seem as though she had some evil intentions going on in her mind, but this was probably due to the corner of her eyes being slightly upturned.

Quite a number of guys would purposely turn around to gaze at her— their eyes falling on the figure with a blazer and a muffler wrapped around her neck.

The teenage girl's name is Tachibana Rina, who also studied at Ouka East High School, in the same class as Daisuke.

Daisuke glanced at Rina from afar before making his way to the end of the

railway platform.

Just like Daisuke, Tachibana Rina usually boarded the train at this time too. Many friends had said that, as long as you got to see her in the morning, the day would be a great one.

However, Daisuke never thought that way.

On the contrary, to Daisuke, the talkative Rina is the type of person that he didn't really know how to get along with.

Just to avoid being noticed by his classmates, Daisuke decided to stay away from them purposely this morning, but was caught by a sudden voice.

"Hey, isn't that Kusuriya-kun over there?"

"Wow it really is. He's here, come on over here."

Daisuke started frowning after hearing the teenage girls' voices.

"M-Morning."

He forced a smile onto his face, and turned at the same time, only to find Rina not making any effort to conceal her discontent.

"Oh it really is Kusuriya. Let's not bother about that guy!"

"Why? There's no problem at all! Hurry Kusuriya-kun, there is an empty place over here."

"So Kusuriya-kun takes this train too eh?"

The other students besides Rina all kindly tried to strike up a conversation with the approaching Daisuke.

"Yeah I do, well, that's because there are more cars in this one, so it's less crowded."

"Even though you might say that, there's the possibility that you have other intentions on your mind? Like what if your target was me? Oh man, that's kinda scary!"

They students looked at Rina, who was saying it in a joking manner while twisting her body at the same time, and burst into laughter.

Daisuke just sighed and shook his head while saying:

“You don’t have to worry since there is not a slightest chance in the world that it will happen, as I happen to like docile girls more.”

The platform broadcast informed the passengers that the train was approaching the station as the vibration rang throughout the rail.

Rina started sulking as Daisuke calmly thought:

Man... This person really is busy with her changing of expressions…

“What kind of attitude is that!? I absolutely hate people like you with no special traits at all, a guy with not a single pain in his life, ever!”

All the other students agreed with Rina’s point of view.

“That’s very true. Compared with the other students, Kusuriya-kun really does not stand out at all! Maybe a change of hairstyle might help out?”

Being asked by them, Daisuke started to play with his hair with his finger.

The extremely dark hair was already so long that it reached his eyebrows. It had not been permed, and neither had conditioner been used on it, but it was about time he got it cut. Even when he recalled looking at himself in the mirror this morning while washing his face, there really didn’t seem to be any special trait about him besides the Band-Aid on his cheek.

“Nah… it’s alright, I am okay just being the way I am at the moment.”

“What happened to your cheek? Did you get into a fight with someone yesterday or something?”

“Oh this. Well I got it this morning when I fell from my bed and bumped into something.”

“Psh! How can Kusuriya, who does not dare dye his hair, get into a fight?”

Daisuke gave a nasty look towards Rika for making fun of him purposely.

“Though I find it kind of a shame, since Kusuriya-kun isn’t that bad of a person.”

“Wow. For you to praise someone like this, don’t tell me you are…..”

“Eh, really??”

“No, no. It’s not like that! Why did you guys think that way??”

The teenage girls started chatting over the issue; only Rina let out a very carefree attitude.

Daisuke, not used to these kinds of topics, played dumb, and diverted his attention away.

Afterwards, he started hearing the conversation of the working class ladies behind him.

“Hey, did you hear about the recent news? There seems to be a Mushitsuki spotted nearby yesterday.”

“Are you really sure that’s true? Do Mushitsuki really exist?”

The students from the same classroom as Daisuke started calling out to him, who had been staring blankly at the figures of the ladies.

“Kusuriya-kun, what’s wrong?”

“Oh… It’s nothing, just kind of heard them talking about Mushitsuki.”

“Mushitsuki? That can’t be true. Where?”

Upon hearing the loud voice of the teenage girl, everyone around them became startled and started turning around at them.

“Idiot, we did not even say whether there are Mushitsuki or not!”

“But Kusuriya-kun he … …”

“I heard that there were sightings of Mushitsuki nearby yesterday.”

One of the teenage girls hurriedly went forward to cover her mouth.

After Daisuke finished talking, he saw his classmates looking towards each other and immediately forgot about what they were chatting about earlier, and whispered softly: “Actually I did see it once before, it really looks like a monster! It’s darn disgusting!”

“I also heard about it before, it seems that Mushitsuki are gathering to form a rebel group or something. Well, all I know is that they are forming some sort of

organization.”

“Well I heard before that the government has spies infiltrating our society to seek out the Mushitsuki that were hiding inside the city.”

Among the teenage girls who were quietly discussing about it, for some reason, only Rina remained silent. Maybe this topic might be kind of boring to her so she was just bored about the situation.

Daisuke let out a sigh.

No matter where he went, there were always these kinds of rumors circulating; it sure made people feel disgusted when listening to it.

It referred to the mystical insects that would devour people’s dreams and hopes. Nobody knew where they came from, or what they look like. However, the (Mushi) would manifest within the young teenagers to feed on their dreams, while growing at the same time.

In addition, the (Mushi) did not only devour dreams.

Maybe as compensation to the host for giving them dreams to consume, or maybe it was simply an act of toying with them — The (Mushi) would give its powers to the host and also follow their commands.

However, Daisuke believed that the reason was definitely the latter.

And if the hosts had their dreams completely devoured, they would die. Once a person became a Mushitsuki, they must accept the fate that their life would be centered around (Mushi).

Above were the recent popular rumors circulating the neighborhood regarding (Mushi); even though they were all rumors with no supporting evidence, the situation at hand had already progressed far beyond that of a rumor.

In this short 10 year period, Japanese citizens have suffered the terror of (Mushi), treating Mushitsuki with disgust and hatred to the bone. Despite the government continuously denying the existence of (Mushi), over the years, the government had been lax on their way of handling the situation.

“Why do these kinds of things exist in this world? Won’t killing all of them solve the issue already!?”

Daisuke forced a smile onto his face as he heard the teenage girl say that.

“Although we don’t know whether there really are such things, it really does make people feel terrified upon knowing about it.”

“There are! I even saw them with my own eyes!”

“This is complete rubbish…….”

Rina muttered to herself silently.

The other students didn’t seem to have heard her say anything, despite looking at her expression. She just turned her head away, while closing her lips tightly.

Just then, the train arrived at the station.

Daisuke waited for the passengers to go past the train doors before making his way to the other side of the window view.

“[Please mind your step when disembarking or boarding as there is a gap in the middle of the railway platform. The train will soon be continuing.]”

The train broadcast rang as the other passengers began to board the train.

“Well, let's continue with the topic from before shall we. So do you like Kusuriya-kun??” [TL Notes: The girls were chatting to each other (I believe there should be at least 3 girls). And they asked who liked Daisuke etc.]

“Man I already said I don’t! Please stop saying that!”

“We might as well not talk about it, boys like him with a painless and docile life are the worst to handle. Ah, dangerous! If you get near him — You might even get pregnant!”

Rina joked with her usual attitude, as if the expression she put up earlier was a farce. Other than Daisuke, no other student seemed to have noticed Rika’s change of attitude.

“This guy sure is a gloomy person — because he would purposely go to the rear carriage so that we didn't notice him every day!”

“Eh? Rina, how did you know that Kusuriya-kun boards this train?”

“Oh, well … it’s just I saw him sometimes when taking the train, haha.”

Daisuke ignored the band of nosy teenage girls chatting away, and used the sleeve of his coat to clean the mist that had formed on the window of the train.

He didn't dislike talking with his classmates. And his action didn't have any meaning behind it, but because the window became kind of foggy, he felt like cleaning it a bit.

"[The train door is about to close, please be careful—]"

The broadcast was played above his head as he could hear the chatter of his classmates clearly.

The windowpane became clear, which allowed Daisuke to stare out in the distance beyond the window.

At this precise moment—

Daisuke, who was staring outside the window, widened his eyes.

A teenage girl was looking at his direction.

Inside the oppositely directed train, a teenage girl was gazing at Daisuke with the same expression as him. She was a cute girl about the same age as him, who looked really good with short hair.

Time stopped at that instant for Daisuke.

The teenage girl had a pair of dark glittering eyes, with a white face akin to that of snowflakes, and lightly colored short hair — everything was burned deeply into his eyes and his memory; which was causing his heart to start racing, and his body to heat up.

The teenage girl at the window of the other train looked at his side, widening her eyes slowly…

— Deep inside Daisuke's heart, a sudden feeling started to spin.



“[The train doors are about the close.]”

With a sound of “poof”, the doors closed.

Then Daisuke came back to his senses.

Right after a “kedang” sound and a slight shake, the distance between Daisuke and the teenage girl started to widen. Even then, the teenage girl’s gazes were still fixed onto him.

At that moment, Daisuke leapt into action.

He pushed aside the other passengers inside the train and dashed towards the train doors.

“Eh… Hey, wait a minute! Kusuriya-kun!”

Daisuke completely ignored his classmates who were startled by his action and immediately pressed the emergency stop button without hesitation.

At that instant, the warning sound began to ring loudly as the train abruptly came to a stop.

Daisuke, ignoring the shouts and screams from the passengers, tried to force open the train doors. He couldn’t even wait for the doors to fully open, and squeezed through the gap of the doors before jumping onto the platform.

“Kusuriya! What the hell are you trying to do!”

Daisuke abandoned the baffled Rika and sprinted towards the stairs. He dashed across the pathway and headed towards the other staircase, which lead to the other platform.

Yet when he arrived, the train that was supposed to be there had already vanished. The rear of the train could be seen leaving the station.

A feeling of despair surfaced within Daisuke’s heart, but just at that moment…

“Uhmm, that……”

A slightly hesitant voice sounded behind him.

He looked back and widened his eyes in disbelief.

The teenage girl, whom Daisuke saw inside the other train before, was now

standing in front of him. However, the empty expression she had earlier had changed, she was now clearly showing a slightly timid expression.

“Uhm… weren’t you on that train earlier on?...”

The teenage girl lowered her head, in a troubled manner, while looking at the stunned Daisuke.

“Ah…..Well…Err I was..”

At that moment, Daisuke spotted a train attendant running towards them from behind the teenage girl.

“Damn it! Sorry, could you come with me for a bit?!”

“Eh? Ah…”

Daisuke forcedly grabbed onto the troubled teenage girl’s hand and dashed towards the exit.

Chapter 1.01: Shiika Part 1

At that moment, the teenage girl's empty and lifeless eyes suddenly restored their luster.

The instant the teenage girl saw the teenage boy through the train window, she slowly began to restore her consciousness as if she was awakening from a long dream.

The teenage girl then got off the train subconsciously with haste.

Without any reason or knowing why, her heart was filled with a strange sense of eagerness. Even though she was expecting something, she wasn't exactly sure of what that was. Even so, her body moved on its own.

With her mind in chaos, she didn't even understand why she had to get off the train.

No, she didn't even know why she was taking the train in the first place. She was not supposed to leave "there", let alone wake up.

Because four years ago, she had already lost everything…

But the moment she saw that teenage boy, she began to feel many things within her awakening. Perhaps it was her memories, emotions, or something else that she wasn't able to describe. But those were things that Shiika had once forgotten, and she didn't understand why it happened now, as it did.

Yet before she could think any further, she was already running with that unknown teenage boy into an open space of a residential area.

There was a wide open lot before them. Perhaps the construction was only done halfway through; as there were many construction vehicles parked around the area.

Bright sunlight spilled down into the pure and transparent air space.

"Hu…. Ha…."

The teenage girl tried desperately to control her breath, while gazing at her

surroundings.

The morning sun, the smell of the wind, the swaying trees, everything that was reflected in her eyes; they all made her feel like she was actually “there”. It felt like hundreds of years had passed, which made her feel nostalgic, as she was unable to believe the fact that she was here now.

There were still memories of her past within her mind. They were of neither pain nor joy, just day after day full of monotony – looking back at it now, that life was like a never-ending hell.

She shuddered the moment she thought about it. Even though she didn’t know why, she somehow “came back to life”.

Then… What about “that”??...

It was not because of her breaking into a full run earlier, but another reason that caused her to break into a cold sweat.

If you’re here, then please appear before me…

Shiika called within her while reaching her hands forward timidly. She closed her eyes tightly, waiting for what was about to happen.

- But, nothing did.

“It’s… not here?”

She opened her eyes in order to look around again. A line of cold sweat ran down the teenage girl’s neck. She didn’t see the shadow of the “thing” that she was in fear of. Therefore she felt a sense of good expectation arise within, and yet she felt … a burst of anxiety.

- Am I really? ...

While she was suspecting whether this was a dream or not, she noticed the teenage boy, who was wearing a black coat, panting while leaning against the front of a construction vehicle. That teenage boy was the one that dragged Shiika to this place.

He seemed to be an ordinary high school student. But why would a well-behaved boy like him…

Shiika started thinking while staring at the teenage boy's profile.

What is this feeling?… …

She didn't know why, but for some reason she just couldn't pull her sight away from him. Just by looking at him, just by staying at his side, her emotions would rise fiercely within her. Yet it was not the result of her bolting here, but a rather warm and wonderful nostalgic feeling.

"Umm… that…"

Shiika spoke timidly towards the teenage boy.

Just then, the teenage boy shot his head up as if he'd just awakened from a shock, and said with a blushed, panicked expression.

"Sorry! We just met, and yet we're in this kind of situation…"

"No… it's… I don't…"

After seeing Shiika shake her head, the teenage boy immediately expressed an attitude of relief. He then looked up at the azure sky, and let out a breath of white mist.

"Great, if you thought that I was annoying, then there would be no way to talk to you again."

"Eh…?"

"Ah, no… It's nothing, ah ha ha!…"

The teenage boy covered it over with a smile.

Influenced by the teenage boy's strange behavior, Shiika's mood became calmer to the point where she was able to smile very naturally.

How many years had it been for me to smile like this?

It really took a long time to experience this kind of feeling again, so long that it would make people feel touched.

Shiika gazed at the teenage boy's profile; he was indeed a normal high school student that could be seen almost everywhere. To tell the truth, he seemed a bit too ordinary.

“Ah… I… umm…”

“Ah, yes?”

“I’m Kusuriya Daisuke, uh… Can I ask what your name is?”

After being asked by Daisuke, the teenage girl fell into silence.

Somehow, he seemed too common to a point.

All the memories that should have been lost were awakened for some unknown reason. It was practically like a miracle. No, in fact, since she now remembered what kind of circumstances she’d been in, she knew very well that she shouldn’t involve any more strangers, but her mouth just moved naturally by itself in the same way as before, like at the platform.

“… My name is... Anmoto Shiika.”

Even though the reply was very quietly voiced, it was stated confidently.

“Amnoto-san … right?”

The teenage girl, Shiika, nodded her head lightly.

“Then, that…”

The teenage boy named Kusuriya Daisuke, seemed like he wanted to say something.

“Amnoto-san! Ca… Can you be friends with me?!”

“Ehh…?”

Shiika raised her head in surprise at the teenage boy. He finally spoke after struggling for a long time.

“Ah… Let me make it clear, I’m not trying to hit on you or anything! Umm… how should I say it…”

Shiika stared blankly at the teenage boy in front of her.

Want to be friends?

The teenage boy in front of her had indeed said so.

Friends…

Waves of confusion rippled over and over within Shiika.

“When I saw you, I felt… I wanted to talk to you...”

Daisuke’s facial expression was filled with both expectation and uneasiness, waiting for Shiika to respond.

Shiika felt like something warm had flown into her heart. There was also something else she felt deep down, in the deepest part of her heart, a feeling that had begun to change. Shiika’s slightly blushed cheeks, started blooming out into a smile…

“…Okay.”

She gently nodded in response.

The teenage boy, Kusuriya Daisuke, seemed to be very happy with Shiika’s answer.

However, when Daisuke tried to ask Shiika for her cell phone number, she shook her head. She knew she would not have such a thing called a cell phone. When Daisuke heard of it, he seemed to be quite surprised.

Shiika asked herself: *Is carrying a cell phone supposed to be a norm nowadays?*

Shiika tried reminiscing about her memories of the past before she returned to this town. Maybe it was true, since she hadn't seen TV for almost four years already. From what she could recall four years prior at the most, that was when cell phones started to get more and more popular.

In the end Shiika asked Daisuke for his cell phone number instead, and the two of them parted ways. Daisuke seemed to be very upset about having to go to school. Shiika said she had to go school as well.

Just when they were about to say goodbye to each other, Daisuke asked Shiika if she was going to do anything after school. Shiika felt troubled at first, but still answered his question honestly with, “Nothing much”.

Daisuke then said he had just finished his final exams, so today was a half day for him, and the two of them ended up agreeing to meet each other again at noon.

“…What should I do?”

Shiika muttered to herself, while walking along a busy street. So many unbelievable things had happened one after another, and her thoughts were just unable to keep up.

Why, did I –

Before her eyes, laid an inescapable place for Shiika. She didn’t know the reason why she appeared here now and the reason why it all happened at Ouka City.

People on the streets didn’t seem to care about the motionless Shiika; they continued to stream forwards.

Ouka City was a new city that began its fast development a decade ago. It seemed like the government was intending on making this city into a satellite city close to the capital, clearly showing their intention on developing the city. Since the city was also very close to the beach, it fulfilled the function of a tourist attraction, which made the entire development even more successful. Knowing that Christmas Eve was coming in three days, everywhere in the new city was filled with red, white, and green colored decorations.

An uneven surface street, that was still undergoing development, began to expand outwards in front of Shiika.

Although she was used to seeing these scenes every day in the past, she couldn’t help but want to cry right now from the overwhelming nostalgic feelings.

The city where Shiika was born.

Four years ago, there was no doubt that Shiika was a part of this city. Similar to the other teenage girls who were walking on the street, she was indeed an ordinary human.

In the endless horizon that she was gazing into, lay a place of terror that she absolutely didn’t want to return to.

Even now, she should not stay in this place. She had no recollection of how she

escaped from that place of terror and how she arrived here. She was also confused about what to do next and where to go. However, since her memories had been restored, she knew that she should leave Ouka City as soon as possible; to Shiika, this city was just way too dangerous.

Shiika turned around, planning to leave the city at once.

But—

"What should… I do?"

Her feet stopped sharply against her will. She turned back to look at the city, muttering to herself once again. She crossed her hands in front of her chest unintentionally, and gripped tightly.

She made a promise to the teenage boy she just met, to meet again at noon.

Even though Shiika was reluctant at the time, after looking at Daisuke's desperate expression, she could not help but agree to his request. If Shiika ditched him now, would Daisuke feel sad? It was Daisuke who wanted to be friends with Shiika in the first place.

Shiika was happy; she had never thought that someone would want to be friends with someone like her. This was perhaps the first time ever. When she was younger, probably because of her being timid and not being good at expressing herself, she'd never made any friends. And now she was planning to break the appointment with such a person –

"Ah…"

A slight pain flashed across her chest. And that pain didn't subside, but intensified as it reached her heart, eventually dispersing.

"I have to hurry and get out of here…"

Shiika bit her lips.

"If I only stay until noon, then it shouldn't matter, right? Then I will end it once and for all…"

While Shiika muttered to herself, she accidentally heard the chitchat between two young adults that seemed like office workers near her.

“Hey, aren’t those self-defense squads? Did Mushitsuki appear again?”

“Wow, are you for real? That place is near my Senpai’s house!”

Shiika was shocked.

She looked in the direction those teen adults were staring at, a Self-Defense Force’s car could be seen driving from the other side of the road.

“Maybe, your Senpai is a Mushitsuki!”

“It would be awesome if that was true! If they take Senpai to the isolation facilities called Special something, then I wouldn’t have to listen to his lecture!”

“Idiot, it wouldn’t be awesome if it was true! Just think about it, if Mushitsuki appeared within the company, everyone would feel disgusted and quit!”

Shiika strolled through the crowds of people, and entered a shadow on the side of a building, then slowly stopped walking.

“…..”

She breathed in deeply in order to calm herself down. The chest pain that she felt earlier had already vanished like an illusion. Instead, indescribable loneliness and sadness had tightly bound her heart.

“I…”

A sense of uneasiness embraced Shiika as she raised her hand up to shoulder height.

If you’re here, then please appear…

She closed her eyes, calling forward again with force just like before. However her fingertips still didn’t feel any change. She opened her eyes timidly; there was nothing on her whitish palm. The sound of relief came out naturally from the corner of Shiika’s mouth because of the sudden loss of tension. She instantly knew that she was released from her state of anxiety.

“This …. is not a dream right?”

Shiika held her hands tightly together, as if she was trying to seize the cold air.

“Maybe before noon, I should go goof off somewhere…”

She whispered softly, raising her head and exposing a natural shallow smile.

Chapter 1.02: Daisuke Part 2

Even God himself performs good deeds for people sometime!

Daisuke thought to himself as he happily slung his backpack over his shoulder.

“Daisuke, what’re you laughing about to yourself man? You’ve been acting strange since this morning already,” asked the classmate sitting next to him after the school bell rang for dismissal.

Daisuke chuckled, “It’s nothing.”

“Come on, stop trying to act dumb! Who do you think it was that actually helped you this morning?”

Not only his friends, but also his female classmates that took the same train this morning questioned him.

Despite being pressured by the teenage girls regarding the incident on the train earlier, Daisuke still came up with a simple answer to try and brush the matter off. However, if it weren’t for the fact that the teenage girls acted like they didn’t know him, Daisuke would’ve had a much harder time trying to solve this problem.

“Ah, it sure is a pity …Kusuriya Daisuke is actually a dangerous person, isn’t he? Everyone, please do not go near this guy! You’ll be infected by his virus that destroys brain cells!”

The person who was exaggerating and saying all these sarcastic comments was Tachibana Rina who just came over all of a sudden. Whilst wearing a thin blazer, one could still see she had a thin figure. The attention of the students immediately turned towards Rina, who was giving off a different vibe compared to the other teenage girls.

Maybe this is all due to her charismatic presence?

Daisuke thought that Tachibana Rina definitely had the traits of a leader. Rina’s voice was loud yet clear, and was easily capable of influencing the people around her.

Daisuke sighed, and turned towards her.

“Who’re you calling a dangerous person, eh?”

“People with such a low profile and normal attitude, are usually the ones who would do dangerous things behind others backs, things like drug abuse or something. Ah, can it be that you are actually a killer? Oh no, he really is a killer!”

“…… Yeah yeah, I’m a killer who likes taking dangerous drugs! I’m sorry for not telling everybody this up till now.”

“Woahh — What a boring response! So lame!”

In contrast to the pissed off face of Rina, Daisuke just laughed the matter off like it was nothing, and went to take his bag.

“You… What’s with that attitude?! You sure seem very unconcerned about this matter!”

“I’m sorry, but today I’m not my usual self. I won’t be bothered by anything Tachibana-san has to say.”

“Wow, so you really must have something good happened to you today to be in such a mood, right?! Come on, do tell all of us!”

Friends started coming at him with questions about the matter.

Despite Rina was trying to hide her curiosity, one could still tell that she seemed to be quite interested in the matter and even concerned about what had happened to him.

“Well… Since all of you put it that way….Alright, I’ll generously let you guys know about what happened.”

“Um, you know… That way of talking sure can irritate people.”

“Yeah, you can tell from his face that he was dying to tell us about it.”

Daisuke smirked in response to the cheeky smiles of his friends.

“Actually this morning I came across a very cute girl at the train station and even managed to become friends with her!”

“Ah is that so? So you are the kind of guy who goes around wooing girls eh?”

“Ah I see — so that was what it was…”

Even though the surrounding people were all stunned by this, Rina’s reaction seemed very much calmer as compared to the others.

However, Daisuke paid no heed towards his classmates’ reactions.

Just thinking about it up till now, Daisuke felt so happy that he could nearly fly. Just knowing that he could meet the teenage girl this morning once more — Anmoto Shiika — made him feel as though he had all the happiness in the world, almost to the point that he could just dance on the spot in front of everyone right now.

He didn’t understand what he was feeling at that moment, but despite that, he didn’t even bother to think about it. Deep inside his heart, he felt a burning passion that was so intense; he himself found it almost unbearable.

However, he did know one thing for that matter.

He definitely wanted to see that girl once more…

Daisuke really wanted to immediately see Shiika once more, wanted to meet her and then talk to her; he was dying for it at that moment.

Even though he had absolutely no idea what to talk about with her first, he wanted to rush towards the location just to see her face.

“I’m going to go meet her right now.”

“What kind of girl is she man? Is she really cute?”

“Damn straight! But then again— if you ask me what kind of girl she is, hmm…….. How should I put in one sentence?”

“Using one sentence to describe her?”

“Simply put, she is the complete opposite of Tachibana-san.”

“…….So who thinks that he should be beaten up, raise your hands!”

Almost everybody in the class raised their hands in response to Rina’s words.

Having achieved the strong support of the class, Rina raised her hand that was carrying the school bag but let it down right after, disheartened. She let out a sigh and dejectedly turned her back towards Daisuke.

“You had better enjoy yourself then. A person without a shred of humor like you will probably get dumped right away anyway.”

“……Oh Come on. Don’t say those kinds of scary things !……”

At that moment, the homeroom teacher came in the class by the front door.

“Ah, I almost forgot to tell you Tachibana.’

“What is the matter?”

“Your art piece has won 1st place in the art competition held by the city, and I must say, it sure is an impressive piece of work!”

A loud cheer could be heard from the classroom.

Rina pulled a long face, it was rare for her to put up such an expression on her face in front of anyone except at Daisuke.

“I don’t recall entering myself in any competition.”

“It seemed that the art teacher secretly signed you up right after she saw your work in the art room. Tomorrow will be the prize awarding ceremony, please remember to attend it!”

After hearing the words of the homeroom teacher, Rina silently turned her gaze away.

“Tachibana san sure is amazing! The winner of the art competition!”

Immediately after Daisuke commented on her work, Rina whipped her head around to stare at him. Her expression became completely different from the one just now; clearly showing a sign of anger. Even the students around them started to quiet down after seeing this change.

“Since you are able to draw so well, why don’t you join the art club? Oh I understand, you have an art studio to run, right? But I don’t remember seeing any art studio around the area……”

“Then what do you think is my purpose in doing so?

Rina’s tone suddenly became a lot colder than before. Maybe it was because of her using cheerful and easy going attitude most of the time, whenever she became serious and started speaking in this clam manner, it was as though she

had changed into someone else.

“What purpose you say? Wasn’t it because of you wanted to enter an arts school in future?”

“Oh, so you thought that going to a college was something natural that one does not need to work for it?”

Rina said in a sarcastic tone, it seemed that she didn’t want to continue on with this topic.

However, Daisuke replied with discontent.

“I do not think that going to college is an easy job. But since it’s someone who can draw well, having the thought of studying in an arts school would be expected unless…Tachibana-san never thought about going to college in the first place?”

“Why must I even bother explaining this to you?”

Maybe it was because of having too much anger; Rina let out a sigh and gave a helpless look.

“Anyway, I am too lazy to tell you about it. Well so long! Naïve and carefree young master.”

Daisuke stared blankly at Rina who just left the classroom, while the other students who witnessed this awkward attitude of Rina feel troubled.

“……..”

Daisuke couldn’t help but look at the seat of Rina who had already left.

On the surface of the desk, many countless tiny marks that seemed like scratching could be seen all over it.

After leaving school, Daisuke stood in front of the Ouka station waiting for Shiika.

The time was shortly after noon, he had come a bit too early before their appointed meeting time.

Daisuke nervously surveyed his surroundings.

The place was filled with people and was very lively. Many couples or people with their families, all wearing smiles on their faces passed by him non-stop. A man dressed like Santa Claus could be seen carrying a signboard, walking around the place. Seeing this spectacle makes people feel that Christmas was really drawing closer and closer.

“Um... Mmm …..”

A familiar voice sounded behind him, causing Daisuke swiftly turned his head around. A short trimmed hairstyle looking teenage girl, whom was wearing a blue jacket, could be seen standing behind.

“Oh, hey Anmoto-san!”

“G-good afternoon.”

Shiika nervously approached him.

Daisuke let out a sigh of relief.

He was kind of expecting Shiika to not appear again… maybe, the event that happened at the station this morning was all just a dream.

He unconsciously stared at her profile, trying to confirm himself that he was indeed talking with her right now and had already managed to meet her again.

“Umm… Mmm …”

Upon seeing Shiika showing a slightly troubled look, Daisuke frantically waved his hands.

“Ah sorry, my bad. Say… Have you eaten your lunch yet?”

Seeing the teenage girl shook her head, Daisuke started looking around for a while.

“Well then, errr…”

Having already come to this point, Daisuke realized that his well-made plan only included them having lunch together but he did not thought about where to eat.

“Um… well why not we eat over there then…….since it is so near anyway.”

Said Shiika as she noticed the frantic actions of Daisuke and pointed in the

direction of a place that he was more familiar with.

“Is it alright if we eat over there?”

Shiika nodded her head lightly and her expression began to brighten, gradually showing more and more of how happy she was.

After taking off her jacket and placing her tray on the table, Shiika appeared more petite than before. Daisuke now realized that he was a full head taller than her after all.

Daisuke fumbled around thinking about what to say.

And after thinking it through a few times, all he could come up was very ordinary topics.

“I am so sorry about pulling you everywhere right after I met you.”

Shiika listened to Daisuke’s words before letting go of her straw she was dangling on.

“Ah …… um ….it’s alright. This was quite interesting actually……”

“Running like that ….. was interesting?”

“Ye…..yea it was.”

Shiika exposed a swallow smile as she replied. Perhaps she was concerned about Daisuke’s feeling?

“There’s something that I’m quite curious off… Anmoto-san… How old are you now? You shouldn’t be older than me right…?”

“I…..I am a high school……first year high school student.”

“I knew it. Then you don’t need to talk to me in such polite manner after all since we are both the same age and year! But then, I never did come across that school uniform you are wearing, where do you come from… “

Right after saying it, Daisuke realized he had just asked something that he shouldn’t being asking because Shiika’s face became very still after that.

Right when he tried to change the topic, Shiika asked a question at that moment: “Umm… Kusuriya-kun…”

“Ah it’s alright. You can just call me Daisuke. I’m used to people who are familiar with me calling me that already. Sorry, this conversation is mainly just me doing the talking.”

“Oh … No it’s alright, that’s not the case at all….well then what about you Daisuke-kun?”

“I am currently studying at Ouka East high school. Have you heard of it? It’s the one two stops away from here, a new school that was built here a few years back.”

Even though the conversation between them was quite awkward, it at least seemed to be progressing.

Just then, Shiika wanted Daisuke to call her by her first name instead of Anmoto. And despite Daisuke felt that it was a little embarrassing calling her Shiika, he got used to it after a short time.

Shiika lived at a nearby city, and is currently studying in a high school near her home. But whenever Daisuke talks about home or school related topics, her face would become gloomier and so he decided not to touch those area.

Her personality sure was a lot more timid than he had thought, sometimes smiling shyly but never laughing. This reaction caused Daisuke’s heart to tighten.

“Eh?”

Shiika let go of her straw and stared in shock at Daisuke.

“Daisuke-kun, you live alone!?”

Daisuke drunk the coffee in his cup before replying calmly:

“Yea… Since there are some issues going on at home, I’m living alone in an apartment outside right now. I have never raised this issue with anyone else in my class before.”

“But then why? What about your…..your family?”

“Well as of now, my uncle is currently my guardian.”

“I….I am sorry……”

“Err…. No it is not much of a big deal, you don’t need to be so concerned

about it. I don't really mind this matter at all; my uncle, aunt and nieces are all getting along with me very well. I've never raised this issue with my friends before because no one talked to me about it."

Upon seeing Shiika drop her head at his response, Daisuke started to feel troubled. Maybe telling her all this is causing her to be more concerned about it…

"Did you …..ever think about meeting your family members again?"

"Eh?"

Daisuke raised his head. Even though this problem did make him felt slightly troubled, he still replied calmly after thinking about it for a moment.

"Well…..yea, saying that I don't would be lying."

"I see……"

Shiika's head stooped even lower.

Daisuke placed his coffee on the table and said with a smile:

"However, I really do want to say Goodbye to them once more."

"Eh?"

"I was separated from them before I could even talk to them. Those people were after all, the ones that gave birth to me, looked after me, and also stayed together with me. To tell you the truth, I really wanted to say farewell to them properly."

Daisuke smiled shyly after he said it. To cover up his slightly blushed cheeks, he deliberately reached out and took the coffee near him.

After looking closely at Daisuke's face quietly for a few moments, Shiika started smiling.

"Well, that is quite true….."

"It sure is embarrassing, telling you about all this pointless things, even making you feel more down."

"No… not at all! How do I put it, I kind of feel that you really are….amazing?"

“Amazing? Are you saying that I am?”

“Mhm. You really did think about the past events thoroughly. And you even thought about events in the future….I really do think that you are cool on this aspect.”

Seeing Shiika say this with such seriousness, Daisuke unconsciously scratched his head.

“Is… Is that so?”

Daisuke took a look at the time on his phone and got up from his chair.

“Well….it’s getting late already, think it’s about time we get going? There’s a cinema in front of us and a very interesting movie is showing at the moment, want to go check it out?”

“Mhm!”

Shiika gently nodded her head, showing her happiest moment from before till now.

After evening, the December air turned a lot colder than usual.

The movie that they saw after lunch was a current hit action movie. Daisuke originally planned to see a cultural romance show but had to change his plan at that point. However, seeing how happy Shiika was whilst watching it, maybe that was a good decision after all.

After seeing the movie, the two came to the playground, and just happened to buy Crepe to eat. Even though it’s an unimaginative and standard trip, Daisuke sure did have a lot of fun, and Shiika seemed to enjoy herself too.

“Do you feel cold?”

“Mmm, I’m fine. Thank you.”

The two of them returned to the front of the train station plaza, sat on a nearby bench and watched the sunset which looked as though it was being covered by an apartment. The sky seems to be rendered into a beautiful twilight orange by the setting sun.

For a period of time, they just started at the plaza silently.

The setting sun shone on the smiling faces of those that walked about, and in the eyes of those people, both of them were probably having the same expression on their face. Just knowing this made Daisuke felt really happy.

Daisuke took a glance at Shiika's profile beside him.

Looking at the pavement that had been rendered orange by the sun, despite she was having a smile on her face, her expression had senses of jealousy and sadness mixing along.

Seeing such an expression on her face, Daisuke felt his chest tighten painfully.

She seemed to force a smile on her face, giving off a rather distant feeling from her, as if nobody was standing beside her and she would just vanish, never to be found again. Shiika must've been feeling some kind of trouble that was causing her to show such a sorrowful expression.

But even so, Daisuke still wanted to remain by her side forever.

Wanting the two of them to continue sitting shoulder to shoulder and watch the setting sun together.

He also hoped that ….. She was also harboring the same sentiments as him.

Just then, the sun vanished beneath the horizon completely.

As if waiting for this moment to come, Shiika quickly got up.

"Well, it's about time I should be off…"

Daisuke also stood up.

"I shall send you off then?"

"No, it's ok, nothing bad will happen to me."

Shiika smiled and replied, but her smile carried a bit of loneliness in it.

"I really had a lot of fun today. Thank you so much!"

The teenage girl looked like she had a lot of fun when she thanked him.

"Nah please don't say that, the one who should be thanking someone is me since I just suddenly invited you out just like this."

"If….there is another chance to play together, it would be nice…"

Another sorrowful expression appeared once more on Shiika's face. Throughout the day, Daisuke had already seen that expression quite a few times already.

"You want to play together again? Sure its fine anytime will do. Say tomorrow my classes end early, but if tomorrow we play again, would that be too sudden for you?"

Shiika seemed to be shocked by Daisuke's suggestion. And as much as she wanted to smile and laugh happily again, her expression turned out to be rather complex.

"Tomorrow…? I am pretty sure that I probably won't make it. Sorry, I —"

Shiika said halfway then stopped, biting her lip and lowering her head.

"Is that so…"

Daisuke's voice seemed to have become heavier but he immediately put up a smile.

"Well if you have time, feel free to call me! I can pick up the phone anytime."

Shiika gave a shocked expression.

"Is it... Is it okay to call you?"

"Yes, of course! I'll be waiting for you to give me a call!"

Shiika was troubled for a while and went silent, but happily replied with a smile: "Thanks!"

That was today's most frank smile.

A reddening sensation blazed across Daisuke's face.

"Well then…….I must really be taking my leave now"

Suddenly, Daisuke called out towards Shiika who was already making her way into the crowd at the train station.

"Shiika!"

The teenage girl turned her head back.

"If you come across anything that makes you feel depressed, please do

remember that you can find me at any time!”

Daisuke naturally said this line.

Even though he never had the chance to ask Shiika about the reason behind her sorrowful expression, Daisuke never wanted to see her show that once more.

“I will rush there immediately! No matter where you are, I will always run to your side immediately!”

Although Shiika wanted to smile, she bit her lip, and remained silent.

Not again. Whenever Shiika showed this expression, Daisuke would feel that pain in his chest again.

“I just want to be on Shiika’s side, is this alright with you?”

Shiika smiled happily at his words.

“Thanks…”

Even though her reply was soft, Daisuke was still able to make out what she was trying to say.

Leaving a smile, Shiika turned around and walked away.

— Next time we meet, I will definitely try to make you laugh.

Daisuke swore to himself silently.

He continued to gaze at the back of the petite teenage girl, till it could no longer be seen.

Chapter 1.03: Shiika Part 2

Happiness –

Shiika felt it from the bottom of her heart.

After entering the station, Shiika leaned against a pole temporarily and waited for time to pass. She then raised her head to look at the hanging ceiling clock. It had been over dozens of minutes since she and Daisuke parted. Shiika stuck her head out from the station's entrance, gazing timidly towards the station plaza.

It is alright, I can't see Daisuke-kun anymore; he probably went back already.

After Shiika made sure Daisuke had left, she returned to the station plaza. The cold air was blowing against her face, but she didn't care about it at all. Suddenly, she felt a chill on her cheek.

It was the snow.

She gazed at the dark night sky; the white snowflakes were falling down one after another.

"…"

With everything in sight dyed in pure white, Shiika stepped forward.

Questions started emerging within her mind –

Why did Daisuke tell her that much about himself. To someone that had just become his friend. And was that the attitude to have when dealing with friends?

Ever since Shiika was born, no one had ever treated her so kindly and considerately, she couldn't help but feel baffled. Were friends supposed to be this considerate? Whereby just by thinking about each other, our heart will fill with these heartwarming feelings?

Yet at the same time, what's with this sorrowful feeling? If Daisuke knew Shiika's "True identity", would he still say those same words? Her worries filled her mind. The memories from four years ago began to emerge little by little.

— Because if we live, we will hurt those around us.

It was what the little boy, not much older than her, said at the time... Due to the fact that he was wearing a huge goggle that covered most of his face, it was hard to tell his facial expression. But at the moment he made the final declaration in front of Shiika, he sounded sad.

“But… I can’t no longer recover…”

Shiika muttered to herself, but suddenly shut her lips to stop the words from coming out.

Is it really okay?

The lingering uneasiness wouldn't go away no matter what. Moreover, to the “Organization” that was after Shiika, these things were not important at all.

She should’ve never stayed in Ouka City, and should’ve never met Daisuke again as well.

Shiika knew very well of the circumstances she was in, that she must leave her birth-place as soon as possible. Ever since she “awakened”, the place where she should be most cautious of, would definitely be Ouka City.

— “However, I really do want to say Goodbye to them once more.”

Daisuke’s words echoed within Shiika’s mind. Shiika felt that he must have gone through many things. In order to arrive at a conclusion like that. His shy talking figure had left a strong impression in Shiika.

“Thank you, Daisuke-kun……”

Just by thinking about Daisuke, Shiika would smile naturally. Even though that she has no one to reply to, even though she was lonely and helpless, she can still smile.

“Thanks to you, I have finally mustered out some courage…”

Shiika walked under the never-ending snow. Her destination was the residential area of the Ouka City.

The location of her home, the home that she was born in.

It took her almost four years, but she was finally able to move on.

No, she had actually forgotten… Ever since she had lost her “dream” four years

ago, she had forgotten everything… She didn't know why she was taking that train… Perhaps… No, if it kept going, she would have never arrived here. She would have forgotten all about her dream, her home and herself. And then imprisoned in that place while living a life of apathy.

But then she met Daisuke and somehow the encounter made her remember everything, although she didn't understand why. Not only that, Daisuke had also given Shiika the courage to come here. Daisuke accepted her gently, just that, it was enough for Shiika to muster the courage to come here.

The snow started falling harder subtly, giving birth to a thin layer of white flowers on top of Shiika's coat. The road beneath her feet had also been dyed white. The white girl under the light of the street lamps, slowly became a unreal scene similar to a dream.

Shiika carefully approached a household by hiding behind the poles. She held her breath, peering around at her surroundings. There weren't any strange figures around. Shiika thought that maybe the changes that occurred on her body hadn't been notice yet.

The door of the household slowly opened in front of Shiika, who was breathing out white mist. A family of three walked out of the door.

Are they about to head out to eat?

The parents' faces were still the same. However, the daughter had changed quite a lot. In addition to the outer appearance, she doesn't seem that happy. It might be because she was displeased by being dragged along with her parents even though she's a high school junior already? There might be other reasons… In short, she was emitting a rebellious atmosphere.

The family of three saw Shiika when she walked out from behind the pole, becoming stunned with their eyes open wide the moment they saw her.

"Shi… Shiika……?"

"Dad, Mom, Long time no see…"

Shiika said quietly while smiling.

The teenage girl whispered as if she couldn't believe what she was seeing.

“Are you really…… Shiika?”

“Onee-chan…”

Shiika stared at the long haired teenage girl in front of her. Although her atmosphere felt different than before, her beautiful appearance and gentle temperament were still the same. The fact that the corners of her eyes were similar to her big sister’s was something that Shiika secretly felt proud of ever since she was young.

Although her parents were slowly stepping away from Shiika, her big sister was gradually approaching her.

Shiika whispered in a begging tone.

“Don’t move.”

Her Family members’ opposite movements suddenly stopped at the same time.

“Please, just stay at where you’re for now, I’ll…… leave very soon”

“Wh… Why are you here…… Four year ago, didn’t you already…”

“Did… you escaped?”

“You’re… here for revenge?

The moment the mother heard the father’s sentence, she hid behind her husband after letting out a short scream.

“Shiika…… All this time, where have you been……”

The big sister said softly with tears in her eyes. Shiika knew her sister would still want to approach her even if she was confused.

The parents that were afraid of her.

And the big sister with a completely opposite attitude.

After seeing the intentions behind the appearances, Shiika made up a decision within her heart.

Being a normal human or not was not important anymore, the situation now clearly showed that, she would just get pursued again anyway.

I can no longer return here —

"… No, I'm just here to say… the things that I always wanted to say it to you all"

Full of determination, Shiika closed her eyes slowly and took a deep breath; filling her lungs with the cold air. After a while, she slowly reopened her eyes, her vision skewed due to the flowing tears.

Looking directly at her own family, she smiled.

"Dad, Mom… thank you for giving birth to me… thank you for raising me… I'm sorry, for the troubles I caused you four years ago… "

Warm tears flowed down her cheeks.

"Onee-chan…… thank you for being so caring about me…… your hair is still so pretty!"

The tears continued rolling down uncontrollably. She whispered with a soft voice through the tears.

"I was very happy that…… I was born into this family…"

Shiika's following statements was covered by an uncontrollable sobbing voice, so they probably couldn't understand her.

"Shiika…… Aren't you coming back?

The big sister's sudden question, filled Shiika's heart with a throbbing pain. She breathed deeply once more and looked directly at her family, blooming out a warm smile to the best of her ability. After that, she turned away from the people who were once her family.

She cried while walking, leaving her footprints step by step on the white carpet. Next to the footprints, were traces of tear drops. There was no turning back, her family would definitely report what happened to that "Organization".

She would have to keep fleeing from now on. The meeting of a woman with a pair of round sunglasses on her, being pursued by that goggle covered boy and falling into the bottomless dark abyss … those kinds of experiences, she will have to face it again…

After returning to the station plaza, a public phone booth appeared within her view. With the tears still rolling down her cheeks. Shiika walked into the public phone booth that was covered by glass frames and took out her wallet.

It was a small purse with red embroidery on top. It happened when Shiika was in sixth grade — when she realized that she had no choice but to leave her home, she purposely took her beloved wallet along with her. And thanks to all the savings that she had stored inside the purse, she was able to hang around with Daisuke today.

There were only a few coins left in the purse now. Shiika then put one in the machine and dialed the numbers.

If one were to really consider the wellbeing of the other party, then there should be no more interactions between them. Even a careless contact would obviously be disadvantageous to both parties

— Shiika was well aware of this, but her body was being driven by an unknown impulse.

The other end immediately picked up the call. When Shiika heard the surprised voice on the other end, reassured by a bit, her hands clutched the telephone handset tightly …

Listening to the voice of the teenage boy that she just met today, and said:

“…… Daisuke-kun? …… Sorry, even though we just parted … I Just …… want to hear your voice…”

Chapter 2.00: Daisuke part 3

After running a good deal around the school compound, Daisuke finally managed to find the person he had been looking for in the art classroom.

At the center of the quiet art room sat a teenage girl.

That teenage girl is Tachibana Rina.

Rina was staring deeply at a piece of canvas that was white as snow. Because of the unique charm she processed, this situation made it all look like an art piece put together.

She seemed to be in a deep state of thought at the moment, with facial expression that was seldom seen in class.

Daisuke quietly opened the door and entered the room, where a strong scent of oil pastels could be smelled in the air.

“Tachibana-san?”

Daisuke’s call surprised the long haired hair, causing her to hastily turn her head around. Her reaction was more intense than what Daisuke had expected.

“Wha…what? Oh… it is you, Kusuriya.”

The Rina, who turned around to face him, seemed like an ordinary high school female student. She was not the energetic, popular, and angry girl that he had seen yesterday.

“Wh…….Why are you here?”

“Have you been doing this here the entire time? I found out because I spotted you when I was passing by this corridor on my way to class.”

“You are rather talkative today hmm? But enough about that, why were you looking for me?”

When the moment Rina shifted her gaze back at the painting in front, her profile had already returned to her usual self. However, she seemed rather unhappy.

Daisuke took out a sheet of paper he was holding onto and passed it to Rina.

“The teacher told me to pass this to you, Tachibana-san. Today is the award ceremony.”

“What is that?”

“It’s the award certificate for your painting. Don’t you remember? The one the teacher told you about yesterday.”

Daisuke held out the award certificate, but it seemed like Rina didn’t have any slightest intention on accepting it, or to even glance at it.

“Come on, hurry up and accept it already. I’m quite busy today, you know?”

Seeing Daisuke holding the award certificate so tightly, a mischievous smile appeared on Rina’s face.

“Oh, I see, so what should I do now? Somehow I don’t feel like accepting it but —“

“Please spare me the trouble. I’ve got to meet someone so I‘m kind of in a hurry.”

Daisuke pushed the award certificate closer towards Rina’s nose.

However, Rina gave a disgusted look when she understood the situation and stared at Daisuke with a cold gaze as she sat on her chair.

“The girl whom you said was very cute? You still haven’t been dump yet?”

“This has nothing to do with you, ok? ……If you don’t intend to take the certificate, I will just put it over here.”

Daisuke found her an eyesore and started treating Rina in a less friendly manner. He looked away as he started sulking like a kid.

“I am sorry for holding you back even; though I’ve got nothing to do with it. But, passing the certificate to me with that attitude does not make me happy at all—. You can just dump it anywhere you want. No, wait; just throw it into the dustbin since it saves me the trouble.”

Staring at Rina, who returned to her painting after saying that, Daisuke sighed. He really felt like just dumping it into the dustbin but he just couldn’t do things

like that.

Daisuke coughed a couple times and raised his voice in the room that was silent once again.

“And— the prize award goes to… Tachibana Rina-dono.”[TN: Dono is a way of expressing respect towards another person just like mister in English]

Rina turned towards him with a shocked expression.

“The participant has shown great ability and sense with this piece in the third scenery painting contest held by Ouka City. The Ouka City’s mayor has…..err…… what am I doing? I just can’t seem to understand what I’m saying. Bah what the heck man.”

Rina became even more shocked as she froze in place.

“Congratulations!”

Daisuke smiled and held out the certificate.



Stunned, Rina continued staring at Daisuke and subconsciously took the certificate from his hands.

“A….Are you an IDIOT!? Don’t you feel embarrassed by that?!”

Daisuke laughed and replied at the same time.

“Seeing you embarrassed sure is interesting.”

“…..You are the worst…..”

“Only those who deserve the praise for their work should receive this certificate. It is disrespectful to those who gave you praise for your work if you do not accept it. Also, I’m kind of jealous of you, since I have never been awarded a certificate before.”

After hearing Daisuke’s words, Rina’s face turned red with embarrassment.

“I don’t really mind throwing away such thing.”

Having achieved his goal, Daisuke stood up and intended on leaving the art room. But after seeing the complicated face Rina had after receiving the certificate, he stopped. After hesitating for a bit, he faced Rina and said:
“…..Actually, I seen Tachibana-san’s painting before.”

Rinas eyebrows twitched when she heard it.

“It was during the time when I just enrolled in this school, I came across a neglected painting inside the art room. Even though the painting was incomplete, I found it … really beautiful. When I heard a piece had entered the competition, I immediately thought of that painting.”

“……I knew about it.”

“Eh?”

Rina stared at Daisuke who was surprised by unexpected reply.

“When I returned to the art room to tidy up the painting area, I noticed that you were smiling to yourself while looking at my painting. It sure was a disgusting sight, just like a nightmare.”

“Eh, is that so. If you had already noticed me, why didn’t you call out to me then?”

“Because I just can’t stand people like you. You looked as if you were raised in a good family without experiencing any hardship. Yet, you’re treating Mushitsuki with discrimination just because you don’t understand their nature. It’s just annoying to me.”

Rina’s voice was filled with an irrepressible hatred, which caused Daisuke to reply disgruntledly: “Why did you bring up the issue of Mushitsuki all of a sudden?”

“Doesn’t the class like to bring up the topic of Mushitsuki? Issues like, Mushitsuki have appeared, or that they should just leave this place. It’s painful to the ears to hear those people badmouth people who might not even exist.”

“Isn’t it obvious that anybody would be afraid of the Mushitsuki? Isn’t it normal for people to fear monsters?”

After taking a glance at Rina, who was ignoring what he said, Daisuke made his way to the art room’s exit.

“Well, I’ll be off. I think it would be better for you to leave early, Tachibana-san. The security guards will be here to lock the place up in a while.”

Rina did not respond to what Daisuke said.

Ouka City coast park, one of the Ouka City’s famous landmarks.

The praiseworthy park that spanned for a few kilometers has become a place of recreation for the people living in its vicinity. From a hill with a grove of trees growing, one could see the ocean in the distance, while the smell of the sea could be smell within the park that was brought forward by the wind.

Daisuke was sitting in the plaza located in the center of the park, staring at the clock tower in silence, waiting for time to pass. Daisuke was still wearing his school uniform under his coat because he had come directly here after school.

— Shiika seemed to be crying back then.

Last night, a few hours after their parting in front of the Ouka train station, he received a call from Shiika.

He became really worried about her the moment she started stuttering and

talking that day, and so he asked to meet up once again today. On the phone she kept repeating “Err… I…”over and over again. Although Shiika was a bit troubled by Daisuke's proposal to meet up at first, she agreed to it in the end.

The arms of the clock tower’s clock were now pointing towards half past one, about 30 minutes prior to the promised time.

First of all, he would need to hear from Shiika before he could do anything. He didn’t know how much he could do to help, but he would do anything to make her smile. He wanted to see her laugh with a truthful smile, instead of one that was forced.

He didn’t understand why he kept thinking about her all the time.

He didn’t understand why it was even Shiika, of all people. But this feeling inside him was the first he had felt of it since he was born.

But he wanted to find out what the feeling was.

No matter what it is, as long as I can help her, I will do it — He then naturally formed a fist with his hand, and clenched them tightly with force.

“Daisuke-kun?”

Suddenly, a voice came from behind him. He turned and noticed a short teenage girl was already standing behind him. It was Shiika.

“Ah Shiika, you’re here. Sorry, I was kind of deep in thought just now…….”

When Daisuke walked across, he noticed that her face, that was looking down, was very pale.

A feeling of uneasiness streaked across Daisuke’s mind.

“… I am really sorry about yesterday. I called you at such a late hour.”

Shiika had a smile on her face but it seemed like she was overdoing it.

“Shiika….did something happen? Your face seems quite off today. Are you feeling alright?”

“It…it’s okay…err…well… that …”

Shiika was talking in the same way as on the phone yesterday, she seemed to have something she wanted to say yet she was unable to do so.

The teenage girl then revealed an expression as if she forced by something. The thought that Shiika was talking with such an expression the night before, caused Daisuke's chest to tighten.

He knew he should have just ran to her side despite it being unreasonable — The feeling of regret inside him caused Daisuke to bit his lip.

He knew something was wrong with her because of last night's call, and intended to go to her immediately. But Shiika just kept saying "I am sorry, but Daisuke and I already….."

After hearing this line, Daisuke could only arrange to meet up with her the next day, which was the meeting today.

Although Shiika was unsure at first, after seeing how concerned and forceful he was, he gave in and agreed to meet up.

Up till now, Shiika seemed to have something going on around her just like when she met him yesterday.

Daisuke knew one thing clearly in his heart — he couldn't leave Shiika alone now.

"Well for starters, let's go for a walk, so you can feel calm again."

"B….but, I…"

"It is alright. We will just walk up till that bench over there. That should be fine right?"

Even though Shiika was reluctant, she still walked towards Daisuke without hesitation.

An old man walking his dog and a woman pushing a pram passed them by.

While walking together towards the bench, Shiika remained silent with her head hung low. Sometimes she would gaze at Daisuke, wanting to say something but immediately lowered her head again.

Even when they were sitting on the bench, the situation remained the same.

After a few minutes, while looking at the people walking in front of them, Daisuke said: "…It's as though this place is another world."

Shiika looked up when he said that.

“This place is so peaceful; everything seems to be moving slowly. Recently no matter whichever part of the street I go, there are always people making noise, but this place is different. Because there is nothing here, that’s why I want to stay in this place. Although my classmates describe me as a “plain” person, I really do like these kinds of places.”

After talking for a while, Daisuke began to snicker as he spoke, while Shiika continued to stare at the people who were passing by.

“But then…there still are a lot of people…..”

Daisuke felt like Shiika hadn’t spoken anything clearly for a long time already. Even the words she said now, after such long time, felt sorrowful— as if they were sinking down in the darkness.

“It is because of that, which makes me……feel like I should not be here.”

Once again Daisuke felt a pain in his chest. However it was more painful than the one earlier, as though his whole heart was being shaken roughly.

“Shiika, what exactly happened…?”

Even though he really wanted to ask, Daisuke stopped himself from continuing.

Daisuke noticed an anguished expression was on Shiika as she bit down on her lip forcefully.

Should I continue pressing her on the matter? What should I do?

Every time Daisuke said something, her expression would become gloomier. He didn’t understand what was causing this teenage girl to be in so much pain.

“….I’m sorry. It must be strange for me to be asking you so much, since we only met yesterday… It’s as though you agreeing to be friends with me is making me go too far….”

“No. That’s not true.”

Shiika then revealed a perplexed expression:

“Being able to be friends with you has made me really happy. It’s just as fun now but it’s just that I…..”

After looking at each other for a while, Shiika dropped her shoulders painfully and Daisuke started to be troubled by the fact that he didn't understand the teenage girl's true intention.

Suddenly, an announcement played from the park speakers.

"[Informing all residents inside the park, due to there being a need to perform maintenance on certain facilities, the park will be closing soon. We apologize for the inconvenience caused to everyone but please make your way towards the nearest exit. I repeat, the park will be performing maintenance on certain facilities —]"

Commotions were heard in the surrounding area. Although Daisuke visited this park a number of times before, this situation actually the first time for him.

Some of the housewives near them were making noises as they pointed somewhere far away.

"Eh? Aren't those people the self-defense force? Why are they here in a place like this?"

Daisuke looked in the direction that they were pointing.

It is true that he could see a few people wearing camouflage gear on the jogging lane.

"… It's a Mushitsuki."

Those words, which nobody had any idea where it came from, caused the faces of everyone around to change. Just then, a buzzing ripping sound rang; it seemed to expand while getting louder.

"It's the Mushitsuki…that's right; the sudden check was definitely a lie."

"Let's—Get away right now—if we don't escape now, we will be eaten by the Mushitsuki!"

"No—Noo! I definitely don't want to come across that."

Daisuke then frowned.

"Mushitsuki?"

Daisuke noticed that the expression of the teenage girl beside him had

changed. She was now gazing fearfully at those that appeared like the self-defense force people.

“Shiika, it‘s alright, don’t worry. As long as we leave now, everything will be alright.”

Even after listening to Daisuke’s words, Shiika was still frozen with fear.

Seeing Shiika this frightened made Daisuke feel really angry. She was already troubled but now thanks to this, wouldn’t it make it even harder for him to talk to her?

“I wish they would tone down a bit. It’s all because of these Mushitsuki, that innocent people like us feel troubled, just hearing rumors about them already caused such a big uproar yet they —”

“…”

“If they really exist, I really would not want to come across any of them.”

Right after Daisuke said that, Shiika widened her eyes as she gazed at him.

“Shiika, what’s wrong?”

Daisuke asked. However, Shiika’s lowered her head as if she was avoiding his gaze.

“… I am heading back.”

After saying that short line, Shiika stood up and got ready to leave.

“Shiika, wait up… …”

Daisuke immediately tried to grab on her arm.

Yet when Shiika turned her head around, she was showing an expression of fear.

“…How…Can this be…”

“Eh?”

“Noo!”

The teenage girl shook off his hand with such force that it caused Daisuke’s shoulder to tremble before pushing him away.

After seeing the dumbfounded Daisuke, Shiika came back to her senses.

“…No…it was not… just now was…”

Even though she wanted to say something, Shiika immediately shut her mouth. After looking at Daisuke sadly, she hastily turned around and ran away.

Daisuke was completely frozen, and could do nothing but watch as Shiika’s outline vanished into the distance.

Chapter 2.01: The Others

When he heard the announcement in the park, (Kakkou) knew something was wrong.

Just when he came out of the exit as instructed, the phone in his pocket suddenly started ringing. The ringtone was the recent hit song performed by the band “Crawling Life” that targeted middle school students as their central audience.

“Tch…”

Although he really wanted to pretend that he didn’t hear the ringtone, he knew that even if he did that; it would be meaningless and so he could only give up and answer the phone reluctantly.

“It’s me —“

“Ah, (Kakkou). How you feeling at the moment?”

(Kakkou) started getting angry since the person on the line didn’t even finish listening to his sentence after “It’s me”, and just kept talking in a light tone.

“… Hearing your voice gives me a stomachache, and makes my head spin. To be honest, the symptoms are serious.”

“Well, you should be taking better care of yourself! So where are you at the moment?”

(Kakkou) could only sigh towards the guy who didn’t even budge after his undisguised sarcasm.

“At the worst place right now, do you really want to know?”

“[I repeat, the park will be performing an emergency check on some facilities —]“

The speakers in the park were replaying the announcement. Even though only 10 minutes had passed since they started playing the announcement, all of the citizens had already vanished. In place of those citizens were strong burly men

wearing camouflage gears, while carrying defense equipment.

“I am very sorry, but the park will be closing soon, could you please leave the premises immediately?”

The man spoke to (Kakkou) in a very polite tone that was filled of persuasive power. However, another man came running by with a panicking face.

“Oui, dude, that kid over there… he is actually a personnel from the SEPB —“

“Get lost.”

After hearing (Kakkou) speak, the men backed away with pale faces. Since the job of the self-defense force was only dispersing the crowd. In their point of view, (Kakkou) was no different; it was just an eye for an eye, and a monster against another monster.

(Kakkou) once again returned to his conversation on the phone.

“Well you heard it.”

“Splendid, even a guy who enjoys taking a walk like those old folks has some use at times! It saves me a lot of trouble picking you up.”

“I told you beforehand that I’m not going to do it! This is not a job for an Inspector. By the way, where is (Kabuto)? Oh, right! He is still helping out at West-south division. If so, what about (MinMin)?”

“Wait a second; this job is yours you know?”

“— What does that supposed to mean?”

“It means that everything is already ready.”

“…?”

(Kakkou) raised his eyebrow; he completely did not understand what the other person was saying. And since (Kakkou) knew how cunning this person was, He figured that the person definitely had something up his sleeves this time.

“I will just debrief you simply. Well the gist of it is, our opponents this time are the brave and pitiful rebels — the (Mushibane), and this time even their leader has come to the frontlines. That is correct, the target is the one you are “inspecting” at the moment. Just this fact alone, proves that this time it’s clearly

your responsibility.”

Upon hearing what the other person said, (Kakkou) could not help but feel annoyed.

“Tch… that dumb girl again….”

“Actually there is another issue at hand that proves that this job is yours ... However, I will explain this reason to you clearly later. We have arranged for you to head towards the north entrance, all your equipment has already been sent there. For the sake of your dream, keep up the good work~!”

“No matter how I listen to this line, it sounds as if you are making fun of me right?”

After saying that line, (Kakkou) cut off the conversation on the phone, and sighed as he headed out.

“… …!”

A sudden faintness caused him to hurriedly lean against a nearby tree for support. His consciousness was fading, which caused him to just stand there.

“Damn it….Is it already over for me?”

A green insect came out of nowhere and landed on (Kakkou) who was talking to himself quietly. (Kakkou) stared at the relaxed insect that was shaking its antenna and cursed,

“I really lost to your hunger… … Just how much of my dream do you intend on eating before you are satisfied?...”

Although the dizziness had not completely subsided, he still had some strength remaining within. He could not fall from such a trivial matter.

“Just you wait….One day I will definitely…”

(Kakkou) gritted his teeth and continued making his way towards the park entrance.

The gear that was prepared for combat purposes was already placed inside the self-defense patrol unit vehicle by the time he arrived.

Interestingly enough, there was not a single self-defense member guarding the

vehicle in the vicinity. Perhaps, it was due to the restraining order that no one was to enter this park that they couldn’t spare any units here to guard… or maybe it’s just they don’t want to come close to this place intentionally.

(Kakkou) thought:

It's probably the latter…

Who would willingly come close, knowing that the other party is a monster?

While thinking that, He donned a combat outfit that was created from the fusion of tree resin and strengthened fibers, and a pair of boots that was made up of a soft metal that reached all the way to his knee.

And on top of this outfit, he put on an unexpectedly light weighted pitch black coat that, although it did not look like it, is said to be capable of withstanding extreme temperatures of up to a several hundred degrees.

But even if the coat could handle that temperature, wouldn’t the person inside be doomed anyway?

On top of a desk with its legs welded to the floor, an awfully solid black object could be seen. (Kakkou) then grabbed the object and put it on.

The object was a pair of goggles that were created from the fusion of a soft metal and rubber. The goggles were large enough to completely cover the eyes, and all the way up to the forehead and ears as well.

Inside the goggles was a pair of lenses which prevented people from being able to clearly see the wearer's eyes.

Although the goggles were capable supporting wireless communications and recording videos, its true purpose was to prevent people from recognizing the appearance of these monsters known as Mushitsuki.

(Kakkou) then grabbed another piece of equipment — an automatic revolver sheathed inside a holster—and placed it inside his huge coat before finally putting on a pair of gloves made of leather. Now prepped and ready to go, figure clad in black from top to bottom had appeared.

… Do they have to go to such an extent for concealing our existence? Well, it's for the best anyway.

Every time (Kakkou) put on his battle gear, he could not help but to think about this—though he understood the fact that this heavily geared equipment was meant to reduce impact from the outside to its best extent. But truthfully speaking, this gear's real purpose was to prevent information from leaking out, right?

If their organization were to be question by the media, all that they had to say is that the figures covered in black do not actually exist and be done with it.

While sighing, (Kakkou) walked down from the truck.

The dry winter winds blew forth, causing (Kakkou)'s hair and shadowy coat to sway in the breeze.

He didn't hate the season called winter.

Even though it was quite cold, (Kakkou) actually liked this feeling. Being able to feel the cold was a sign of him being alive, and as long as he thought about withstanding the cold, it proved that he still had the will to live on.

He felt that, if he was to take a step back and take another look at his surroundings, the things that he liked and appreciated would probably be unexpectedly high in number.

"Good work, (Kakkou)!"

In front of (Kakkou)'s line of sight suddenly came a lively voice.

At the deserted park entrance, a figure that came out from nowhere could be seen standing.

Although the person was wearing the same outfit as (Kakkou), judging from the vest like coat and two long twin tails above their ears, it was clear this person was female. And judging from her height and voice, her age was about seventeen or eighteen. Probably older than (Kakkou) by a bit.

"It's the first time for me to be grouped with you right? Well please take care of me, the legendary Kashu level one ranked Mushitsuki-san!"

Upon hearing the lively voice, (Kakkou) could not help but frown beneath his goggles.

— Currently, the existence that was known as the (Mushi) that could devour

people’s dream was only found in Japan.

Just how much of this was true? (Kakkou) honestly didn’t really know. But according to the organization he’s from called The Special Environmental Preservation Bureau, that was the truth.

The Special Environmental Preservation Bureau— or simply called the SEPB, does not actually exist in name. Regardless of whether a member of SEPB was an official, civilian, worker, or just an information provider, they had to disguise themselves in society as ordinary humans while living their own lives. Only until they receive news of a Mushitsuki appearing, would they then act under the Special Environmental Preservation Bureau's identity and use its authority. They do not do so just for the sake of capturing Mushitsuki; but to prevent the existence of Mushitsuki from being revealed to the public instead.

Ironically, the ones capturing the rogue Mushitsuki were actually Mushitsuki as well; they are those that work under the government with the condition they be given a certain amount of freedom.

Those Mushitsuki that became an employee of the Special Environmental Preservation Bureau would be further categorized according to their ability and capabilities.

Furthermore, the Mushi may be categorized into three different types in accordance with their traits— Minion type, Special type, and Fusion type.

In addition, those that contain purely offensive combat power, and are equally capable Mushitsuki will be classified as “Kashu”; those that have a unique special ability will be classified as “Ishu”; while those that have a special condition with a great importance or shrouded in mystery will be known as “Hishu”. These types would then be further broken down into different levels of threat, ranging from level one to ten, one being the highest.

Currently almost all of the Mushitsuki were classified as Kashu. However, only a very few Mushitsuki were worthy enough to be ranked into levels within this majority. And SEPB possessed majority of those ranked Mushitsuki. Among them, (Kakkou) who achieved the title of level one ranked Kashu was said to be a miracle.

“Eh, you’re going to ignore me? You sure are just as unsociable as before— or

maybe ….the great (Kakkou)-sama, will never bother with a Kashu level five ranked Mushitsuki like me?”

Opposite of (Kakkou) who remained silent, the teenage girl that was wearing a goggle — (MinMin) —spoke in a very lively voice.

(MinMin) is a part of the East Central Division, and also one of the very few Mushitsuki that was ranked a level. The combat squad that she was assigned to was a squad whose main tasks were to capture and exterminate any of the Mushitsuki that have not been registered into the government list.

On the other hand, (Kakkou), who only started in spring, was assigned to the Inspector squad; whose main tasks were maintaining surveillance on marked Mushitsuki.

“…”

(Kakkou) ignored the teenage girl and surveyed the quiet park.

He actually does not hate (MinMin).

But it was the opposite case for her, (Kakkou) knew that (MinMin) detested him; and he had a rough idea of the reason behind the hatred.

The fragrance from the lake which filled the air; had been polluted with the stench of smoke. There seemed to be battles occurring somewhere in the park already.

(MinMin) completely did not mind that she was being ignored as she walked into Kakkou's sight with light footsteps.

Her soft lips moved into a smile.

“Hey (Kakkou)-kun. Have you heard the latest news?”

(Kakkou) did not show any special reaction to her words. He thought that the topic of the conversation would be something unimportant; but the information that came out from her mouth was something that he did not expect.

“The Hishu level one ranked Mushitsuki that was turned into a Fallen four years ago — (Fuyuhotaru), had escaped from the isolation facility yesterday.”

“!”

(Kakkou)'s heart was beating so fast that he felt as if it would burst.

He then turned to look at (MinMin) who was laughing happily.

“Ahaha, you were indeed shocked! I guess it can’t be helped, since the person who turned (Fuyuhotaru) into a fallen was you after all! At that time, I still hadn’t become a Mushitsuki so I’m not sure about the details. But it did show on the database that incident was a disaster that turned more than half of the SEPB’s members into fallen, isn’t that right?”

The teenage girl’s tone contained traces of sarcasm.

— (Fuyuhotaru) actually escaped….?

The memories from four years back began to awaken like flash.

After crossing a barren land that seemed surreal, and passing by countless bodies of his comrades, he arrived at his destination.

Yet the scene that lay before him was so unbelievable that it seemed like someplace from his imagination.

In that quiet residential area where the sound of snow falling onto the ground was deafening enough for one’s ear. It was there that he talked with the young girl.

When the young girl turned about to face him, her pupils were already losing their light.

“To be precise, it was not her escaping on her own, but rather another person that helped (Fuyuhotaru) to escape.”

It was only after hearing the bunny head girl’s voice again, that (Kakkou) came back to his sense. He was subconsciously clenching his fists tightly.

“Ahaha, it appears that you also have an interest in this matter, right? Since after all, there are only five Mushitsuki that were ranked level one. If you were to fight once more with (Fuyuhotaru), it is not guaranteed that you will emerge the victor. Perhaps, (Fuyuhotaru) might win this time?”

“…”

(Kakkou) silently stared at (MinMin).

“Wa — so scary, (Kakkou) is actually angry! What should I do — I am going to be killed—“

(Kakkou) purposely diverted his sight to another direction, shifting his attention away from the teenage girl.

As to what extent the information given by (MinMin) was true, was unconfirmed at the moment; but it would definitely be a big issue for the Special Environmental Preservation Bureau for sure.

(MinMin) who was making noise on her own suddenly calmed down, and questioned (Kakkou) in a very low voice.

“But judging from your reaction, you’re probably not the one who helped (Fuyuhotaru) on escaping, right?”

(Kakkou) silently looked into (MinMin)'s eyes… He was sure that, from the moment that the news of (Fuyuhotaru)'s escape had spread, he was already suspected as the one who committed it.

“The person who was in charge of monitoring (Fuyuhotaru) was (Namie), a Kashu level five ranked Mushitsuki just like me. According to the list of Mushitsuki that was registered, there weren’t that many that could escape from (Namie). And since you had some connection with (Fuyuhotaru), of course the Central Headquarters would suspect you for it! In the worst scenario, they would probably issue you a confinement order. — And if you're wondering how come I’m so knowledgeable on the situation, it was all because of the trip to the Central Headquarters yesterday with Haji-san. You already know that Haji-san has so many enemies, right? That’s why he requires a bodyguard to follow him whenever.”

(MinMin) completely paid no mind to (Kakkou); who remained silent throughout this time, and happily talked to herself.

Just then, from a speaker within their goggles, came a familiar voice.

“Attention all SEPB personnel, are you in position?”

It was a calm voice that contained some traces of laughter which came from person that (Kakkou) was conversing with on the cellphone a while ago.

He is the Special Environmental Preservation Bureau, East Central Division's director — Haji Keigo.

"I think that all of you already know this, but the opponent this time is the members of the Mushitsuki rebel force, (Mushibane). If we were against those lackeys under normal circumstances, just (MinMin) alone would suffice. However, due to the fact that the queen and her special bodyguards of the (Mushibane) are here today, we requested for (Kakkou) to head out. Other personnel that have no instructions given besides, (Kakkou) and (MinMin); are to draw the enemy forces towards the position where (Kakkou) is situated. If you do incite the (Mushibane) too much, and cause their leader to be serious…. You will easily cease to exist from this world."

Although the contents of his words were serious, Haji's tone was rather light hearted.

For the sake of rebelling against the government's decision to hide the existence and oppress Mushitsuki, in one short year, a gathering of Mushitsuki users from around the country occurred.

That is the Mushitsuki organization known as (Mushibane). Their objective is to protect any newly discovered Mushitsuki from being captured by the Special Environmental Preservation Bureau. It is said that their organization not only contains Mushitsuki, but civilians as well that actually support their standpoints and ideals.

Unlike the SEPB that relied on a few high level ranked Mushitsuki, the reason that the (Mushibane) could expand up to their current size was completely due to the contribution of their esteemed leader. The leader of (Mushibane), who possessed a high overwhelming offensive power, has already cost the lives of many SEPB personnel. Hence, the Special Environmental Preservation Bureau has regarded the head of the (Mushibane) as a major threat and assigned her with such title —

Kashu level one —

(Kakkou) is the (trump) card of the Special Environmental Preservation Bureau, and is on the same level as the (Mushibane)'s leader. Discovering another Mushitsuki user that had been classified as a level one after a few years caused

fear within the staffs of the Special Environmental Preservation Bureau. Which they quickly reassigned (Kakkou) from the combat squad to the inspector squad so that he can monitor and control the enemy at the same time.

“Good, since the mission has already begun, there is one issue that I would like to ensure that all personnel within the park to take note of. But I think many of you had already known about this already since this world has too many people with a loose tongue. Nevertheless, if this goes on, it will cause confusion on the commanding side. So to all personnel who are in charge of their respective areas, please pass the information to the other personnel in the area.”

“Yes sir —”

MinMin put her hand into her coat and took out a thin file like object.

“Tada! This is that data! Here, this is (Kakkou)’s share!”

After he received the file, (Kakkou) took a look at the cover page. On its cover in large text, were the words (Outsiders Secret), and a list of punishments to those who break the regulations.

“(Fuyuhotaru)—”

Haji’s words caused (Kakkou), who was planning to flip through the contents of the file to stop in his tracks.

"Those who were present during the aforementioned case are few in number I presume. The corresponding party involved is the Ishu level one Mushitsuki user that was turned into a fallen because her (Mushi) was killed by (Kakkou) four years prior. If I were to state that, that the aforementioned case was the disaster that cost the lives of half of the members of the Special Environmental Preservation Bureau; then it would be easier for everyone to understand just how grave the current matter is right? … Yesterday, (Fuyuhotaru) had escaped from the isolation facility "East – 33.” [TL note: Fuyuhotaru was classified as Ishu when she was first discovered, but after awakening from the fallen status, she was then classified into Hishu. Just a head up]

Even though Haji’s tone was light and contained no traces of panic. The personnel inside the park would still probably be shaken by it; just like how (Kakkou) reacted when (MinMin) brought him the Intel.

Four years ago—

A unique and very powerful Mushitsuki was found.

The Mushitsuki was then registered as a Hishu level one Mushitsuki and given the name of (Fuyuhotaru). After being discovered a few days later, she was detained after her (Mushi) was killed.

The one, who successfully detained (Fuyuhotaru), was a young Mushitsuki who had only just entered the Special Environmental Preservation Bureau.

His codename was (Kakkou).

As a result of (Kakkou) completing such an important mission, he was assigned the title of Kashu level one, the strongest Mushitsuki.

“According to (Namie) who was in charge of monitoring (Fuyuhotaru), there seems to have been someone assisting (Fuyuhotaru) in her escape. Although the injured (Namie) was unable to identify who the culprit was… I was able to obtain some very interesting information from (Namie), who continued to monitor the situation. It seemed that (Fuyuhotaru) has managed to recover from her fallen status and has once again returned here, to Ouka City.”

“…!”

This time, (Kakkou) was really dumbfounded by the news.

“… Is it really true?”

(MinMin) meekly muttered to herself, it seemed like she was not informed about this news as well.

Having one's (Mushi) killed, and then recovering from the fallen condition was something that had never happened before. Well at least (Kakkou), up until now, had never heard of this ever happening.

— Another problematic matter …

(Kakkou) mumbled to himself within.

If the news that she has managed to stand up once again from the fallen state is true, then, Mushitsuki would definitely want to get their hands on (Fuyuhotaru). Since everyone wants to avoid the reality of them turning into a

fallen one day, they would definitely want to find out a way to free themselves from this condition called “Mushitsuki”…

"As to why she would return to the place where she was born and turned into a fallen, we still do not know at the moment. Considering the situation at hand, it is obvious that returning to this city would pose the most danger for her. Of course, there is also the possibility that she is still in a confused state at the moment, since she has just awaked from being a Fallen."

“Hmph...”

(Kakkou) clicked his tongue.

When he heard the news about (Fuyuhotaru), the first feeling he felt was irritation.

If it was just an escape, she probably would have been taken away by “Someone”. But, if she was to awaken from the Fallen state, the situation was no longer that simple. She was most likely acting under her own intentions, and decided to return to this city.

—What the hell is that idiot doing?! If she had already awakened, then she should have escaped to some place far away already….!

While complaining to himself in his heart, he started suspecting the Haji’s motives.

He completely did not understand this man, who was in charge of the East Central Division of the Special Environmental Preservation Bureau, what exactly was he planning?

No matter how he thought about it, the contents of Haji's briefing, were issues that should not have been brought up at that particular moment. In this case, needless to say, not only would it cause trouble for those in command, but it may in fact create the opposite of its intended effect. The issue of (Fuyuhotaru) would mostly likely preoccupied their mind, caused them to divert their attentions away from the enemies in front of them right now, right?

Yet in contrast to (Kakkou)'s worry, Haji continued on as he spoke in a light hearted tone.

“What is really shocking is that we have not yet confirmed the news of (Fuyuhotaru)'s (Mushi) coming back to life. I intend on ordering (Namie) to maintain surveillance on the (Fuyuhotaru) situation. This is also to find out the results of the research being carried out at “East-33” which is also known as (GARDEN).”

(Kakkou) raised his eyebrow behind his goggles.

“Research? What is that? Did they do something at that place and achieved such result? That sure is — impressive.”

Although (MinMin) said it as though she is in awe by it, (Kakkou) just could not believe it as easily as her. Haji’s words were just too sudden, and the timing just seemed too perfect.

After seeing (Kakkou)’s expression, (MinMin) immediately changed her attitude.

“If it is just some idiot foot soldier, they will probably think the same way I did right?”

She gave a smile which seemed to signify more than it seemed, she then said as she faced (Kakkou):

“As expected of (Kakkou), you still seem to be calm. However, my mind seems to be much sharper than yours; I've already guessed Haji-san's main motive.”

“… ”

(Kakkou) glanced at the ecstatic bunny-headed girl once, before continuing to read the cover of the data in his hand once more.

He then stared deeply into the contents of the “Outsider’s secret”, before grabbing it with both of his hands tightly.

“Eh!?”

(MinMin) let out a surprised voice.

(Kakkou) used both of his hands to tear the data, which he had not even seen, right in front of the teenage girl; and threw away the torn paper at his pleasure.

“Oh—You are trying to show that “This has nothing to do with me” right? I

never knew that you could actually show such an attitude, yea —”

(MinMin) stared coldly towards (Kakkou), and placed her hand on her ear beneath her goggles, and lightly coughed.

“Ahem — (MinMin) urgently reporting to branch director, urgent report! (Kakkou) didn't even look and the Intel and merely tore it apart on the spot, is this an act of treason?”

She purposely spoke in a panicked tone and after reporting, she laughed and turned towards (Kakkou).

(Kakkou) leisurely ignored the teenage girl.

“Ok, I will find some other opportunity to give him another copy! Next time, should I offer a circle of flowers as well?”

Haji’s reply carried a hint of sarcasm. The one who was shocked this reply happened to be the bunny headed girl instead.

“But…! Why…”

"(Kakkou), more than anyone else out there, clearly knows what he must do right now. Regarding the matter with (Fuyuhotaru), as long as (Namie) maintains watch of her, we can make our move at any time. What I would like to point out, is the matter that should be of more importance; and that is the enemy before us— the (Mushibane). This is because the enemy is said to be the as strong as (Fuyuhotaru) … a Mushitsuki that is also ranked as a level one—(Ladybird). [TL note: using English name (Ladybird) since it's already said in katakana instead.)

“Well then, how did the meeting yesterday go? (Namie) seems to have seen a glance of the culprit that took (Fuyuhotaru) away, and the report seems to describe it as someone similar to (Kakkou)…Does this mean that there is enough evidence to place the order of treason on (Kakkou)?”

(Kakkou) frowned from her words.

“— Kashu level five personnel, (MinMin).”

Once the bunny head girl heard Haji’s deep voice, she immediately changed her attitude.

“Y-Yes!”

“Please take note that you are not to say anything that disrupts the chain of command…bluntly put, the main base's commands are nothing more than a formality only. They are very clear, that only (Kakkou) can deal with those level one Mushitsuki — like (Fuyuhotaru), (Ladybird), and Harukiyo.”

“B-but…ok, I am very sorry.”

(MinMin) seemed to want to say something, but tried to hold it back silently. She averted her anger, and stared at (Kakkou) with hatred …

(Kakkou) of course just ignored her just as before.

However, (Kakkou) could not pretend that he didn’t hear the statement that (Namie), who monitored (Fuyuhotaru), had made.

Kashu level five (Namie) — (Kakkou) had heard that this individual was a female. It seemed like there was a need to meet her in person, to understand the actual situation.

Haji continued to talk in a very light hearted tone as before:

"Right, talking about Harukiyo made me remember that, his companions appear to be in this park as well. Although this has not yet been confirmed, several sightings have been reported to me already."

“Eh!? That stinks……”

(MinMin) gave an unhappy expression on her face.

Even though (Kakkou) did not show it on his face, he had the same feeling as (MinMin). Just (Mushibane) alone was already difficult enough to handle, and now another troublesome foe has appeared.

The so-called Harukiyo, is said to be the third force of Mushitsuki besides the Special Environmental Preservation Bureau and (Mushibane).

Other than the information that their leader is addressed as Harukiyo, and a few reported sightings of their comrades' (Mushi), the rest of their organization was a mystery.

Unlike the Special Environmental Preservation Bureau and (Mushibane) that had overwhelming numbers, they are said to be an organization that consisted of a few but highly capable members. Alongside their leader Harukiyo, who is an

Ishu level one Mushitsuki.

(Kakkou) bit his lip tightly, and clenched his fist inside his coat.

For a long time running and up until now, the three factions which had a level one Mushitsuki each: The Special Environmental Preservation Bureau, (Mushibane), and Harukiyo— have been in constant conflict with one another. Although the factions were not completely evenly match, they maintained a sort of balance. But now that another level one Mushitsuki… (Fuyuhotaru)… has emerged, the situation is now rapidly changing.

— It means that everything is already ready!

Haji's words flashed through his mind once again.

Haji Keigo was definitely planning something. From his words, it seemed that everything was going according to his plan.

"Ah, in the past, Harukiyo has always been one of the targets that we have sought to exterminate, this time however, you may ignore them. Everybody please remember your priorities— the most important target to destroy is (Mushibane). The matter of (Fuyuhotaru) can always be settled at our leisure. Well, in regard to (Fuyuhotaru)'s revival, I know that it's not merely an interesting topic to all Mushitsuki out there, but I hope that everyone can remain patient for the time being. As to the matter with Harukiyo… let us assume that their current objective is to observe the situation. Well then everyone, good luck in the battle!"

Everyone thought that Haji had finished talking, but then once again his voice popped up.

"Ah right, I almost forgot, this time I am also present in the battlefield. So please do not draw enemy forces towards the south entrance of the park where I am situated. Well the other issue is the same old protocols; please do not forget to record the situation… that is all!"

After saying those words, this time was really the end of the transmission.

(Kakkou) raised his eyebrow. Haji came!? Why the hell would a director who's in charge of command come to the frontlines specially!?

“Well that shows (Fuyuhotaru) has become the hot topic these days right?”

(MinMin) said in a sweet voice.

Yet, (Kakkou) kept his attention fixed on the park, and did not reply.

“You know that you could say something right!? If you do not like the topic of (Fuyuhotaru), we can always change it!”

Even though she was completely ignored, (MinMin) didn't seem to mind. Maybe you could say that she had something wrong with her mentality? Or you could also say that she already did not expect (Kakkou) to reply to her conversation.

"Disregarding the fact that Harukiyo’s members are here… Why does the (Mushibane) want to fight against us? Don't you agree that Mushitsuki are actually quite powerful? They can almost be called superhuman. And not to mention, we of the SEPB are the chosen few amongst the many, so then why do they refuse to become one of us."

(Kakkou) silently turned away, and looked at the hilltop with shrubs growing near it… Yet (MinMin)’s bunny head suddenly blocked his view.

“You must think that you alone are enough to handle the situation, right?”

(Kakkou) and (MinMin) both exchanged looks. Although she seemed to be smiling, her voice contained animosity… she revealed her true emotions after all.

“I will immediately kick you down, and become the next lead Mushitsuki of the SEPB, that is my dream.”

(MinMin) smiled with a sense of challenge towards him.

“(Kakkou), what is your dream?”

After (Kakkou) was asked, he looked up towards the sky. At the end of the clear sky, a lot of dark clouds could be seen floating.

Looks like it is going to rain soon…

In this sort of season, anyone would hope for snow right? Even he was looking forward to a snowy Christmas a few days from now.

“…Well, I hope that it will snow on Christmas.”

Upon hearing (Kakkou), who finally opened his mouth, the teenage girl tilted her head.

At that moment, a loud explosion could be heard in the distance. The sound continuously boomed, and slowly got further away from the north entrance where (Kakkou) was situated.

“…?”

If they were to follow Haji 's strategy, the fight should be drawn closer to this area instead. However judging by the current events, the South Gate, which was situated opposite of the North gate— would probably become the battlefield.

As (Kakkou) analyzed the situation, he suddenly recalled the words of the teenage girl earlier— "I will kick you down."

No matter how he thought about it, those words didn’t seem to be appropriate to say to one’s comrade.

The moment when (Kakkou) looked back, (MinMin) was simultaneously calling out her (Mushi).

“As expected of (Kakkou), you have realized it already? However, it is already too late!”

A (Mushi) appeared at the teenage girls’ feet.

Although it was so small that you could hold it with both hands, judging from its dark brown shell and four glowing eyes, one could tell that it was not normal. It looked like a cicada, however the difference between its six wings and its main body, was just too huge.

The cicada rapidly beat the rear wings on its back, and sounded an ear piercing chirp.



An attack with an intense change in air pressure charged straight towards (Kakkou). An ear piercing sound wave that was way beyond the limits of human hearing then surrounded (Kakkou).

With (MinMin) as the center, everything in her surroundings began to burst from swelling within. Huge trees, the long benches on the pavements, and the lamps above the head, were turned to dust after the intense vibration.

Being affected by the mind-splitting sound waves, (Kakkou)'s vision distorted as an intense pain began to stir his entire mind.

"Ugh…!"

(Kakkou) forcibly maintained consciousness, and jumped from the ground as he stared downwards.

Facing (Kakkou)'s action of increasing the distance between them, the cicada remained motionless in place silently. Yet, the ear deafening sound continued to intensify as the cicada's body began to vibrate from the sound played.

(Kakkou) then reached into his coat and drew an automatic revolver.

"Tch! Kakkou!"

A green insect that came from nowhere responded, and landed on top of the barrel of the revolver; it was an insect with a similar appearance to a Cleridae. [TL note: It's like a checkered beetle, but with abnormally long antennas. I will be keeping it in Japanese name, and the Mushi in its name will not be braced.]

Kakkou Mushi then fused with the revolver.

Afterwards, many feelers came out from the gun frame, and wrapped around the body of (Kakkou). The feelers began to fuse with (Kakkou)'s body as the arm and shoulder parts of the coat was torn apart from within; On his right arm, green and black patterns could be seen.

In an instant, (Kakkou) fused with his (Mushi), and pulled the trigger while aiming at the brown cicada.

A heavy gunshot rang throughout.

However, the brown cicada rapidly jumped towards the side with the bullet narrowly missing it. The wooden bench behind it on the side of the walkway was

blown into bits.

“(MinMin), what stunt are you trying to pull? Don’t tell me you are….”

“You never expected that one of the members would defect towards (Mushibane) eh? Well, I have always wanted to fight you!”

The cicada landed near the foot of (MinMin) who was grinning. Not just the wings, but the entire body of the cicada’s body began to vibrate fiercely.

At the moment when (Kakkou) aimed his gun again, the cicadas chirping suddenly quieted down.

“After building up power, my (Mushi) will not lose to your gun!”

“…!”

(Kakkou) immediately pulled the trigger.

However in an instant, the cicada suddenly vanished. The bullet that came out from the revolver created an impact crater in the ground, which that had nothing in it.

After that, a spinning shadow, approaching at high speeds appeared in front of (Kakkou)’s eyes. (Kakkou) immediately dodged the shadow after landing onto the ground, and a loud noise sounded behind him.

The cicada dug away the ground, and reappeared in front him after shaking away the dirt.

— Kashu level five Mushitsuki, (MinMin), her (Mushi) has two abilities.

One is to generate powerful sound waves through the vibration of the wings, and the second is high speed tackling after building up power. Among the abilities, the latter is capable of matching up to (Kakkou)’s revolver’s firepower.

“(MinMin)! Are you serious about this?”

(Kakkou) readjusted his combat stance, and after raising his gun, another loud explosion was heard again in the distance. However, this time it seemed further away from the ones earlier.

While (Kakkou) and (MinMin) were facing off, the enemy seemed to be advancing in the opposite direction and head towards the south end of park.

“… Damn it!”

"Nonono! You cannot leave now! You still have to play with me more!"

(Kakkou) could hear (MinMin)'s voice behind him, as she spoke in a leisurely tone:

A super sound wave stormed once again.

(Kakkou) swiftly hid behind a tree, yet the big cedar tree suddenly exploded within before crumbling into powder.

Facing (MinMin) with his back, (Kakkou) ran at full speed towards the south end of the park. He got off the paved walkway and dashed into the forest.

Every time a loud noise sounded from behind, the trees in the surrounding would explode from within.

(MinMin) is a Kashu level five ranked Mushitsuki; even though her overall firepower cannot match (Kakkou)’s; she was still a powerful Mushitsuki. In the current situation, (MinMin) defecting is a huge blow to the SEPB.

“Just handling (Mushibane) and Harukiyo is already a pain, and now I have to deal with internal turmoil within the Division … …what the hell are you trying to do, Haji?!”

(Kakkou) grumbled to himself as he dashed through the forests. Right when he reached the front of a small pond, a group of shadows came down from the sky; it was a teenage girl holding on to the leg of her (Mushi).

“Your face sure is pale; totally unlike the cool image that (Kakkou) gives! Do you really care about Haji-san that much?”

The abnormal cicada began to beat its wings once again.

In the instant before (Kakkou) was about to struck by the supersonic wave, he jumped with all his might. After fusing with his (Mushi), (Kakkou) had attained superhuman physical capabilities, and could easily vault across the teenage girl’s head.

“How can that be…!”

(Kakkou) ignored the shocked teenage girl, and once again jumped forward; he

crossed the pond, and ran through the center of the grass patch in the middle of the park.

If he were to engage combat with (MinMin) right now, he probably will not lose. But before that, he must confirm one matter.

(Kakkou) thought to himself as he ran at full speed.

—Would that person really defect?

Even judging from the actions of the teenage girl just now, (Kakkou) still found it hard to believe it.

The teenage girl called (MinMin) was actually quite well known within the Special Environmental Preservation Bureau. She admired the East Central Division branch-director Haji Keigo to an unbelievable level, and even been suspected for having a special relationship with Haji.

Even though he was unsure of the truth of the current situation, did (MinMin) actually defect to the rebels? Not to mention the fact that she evaded Haji's grasp— whose strategies and antics were of genius caliber.

Thinking deeper into what (MinMin) had said earlier. Her dream was to become the top Mushitsuki in the SEPB. (Kakkou) felt that what she said was probably her own true intentions.

(Kakkou) ran quickly into the south end of park, and opened a link on his wireless radio in his goggle, but only static could be heard; he was completely unable to tell what the other party was saying.

After passing by the walkway, he could see a countless number of silhouettes moving about in front.

There were about tens of people, along with the silhouettes of their (Mushi), and the one in the corner was —

“So that guy really came after all? That idiot!”

(Kakkou) pulled his coat over himself, and charged into the center of the square which was becoming a battlefield.

A green colored (Mushi) with glowing eyes appeared in front of his eyes as if it was intending on blocking his path.

“Get out of my way!”

(Kakkou) shouted out, and waved his other hand which was not carrying the revolver forward. The green colored (Mushi) was sent flying from this superhuman blow as its whole head was smashed to pieces.

“…….!”

Exactly when the people in the square sensed the appearance of (Kakkou), and turned their head back at the same time. He took this chance, and moved towards the opposite direction of the square.

“It sure is rare of you to shout out so loudly, do you care about me so much?”

A tall young man who was wearing frameless glasses, said in a very awkwardly-timed lighthearted tone. Although his five senses seemed to be working fine, his face looked pale like a sick person. His suited figure in this kind of crowd made him stood out a lot.

He is Haji Keigo, about twenty eight years old, the East Central Division’s branch director of the Special Environmental Preservation Bureau’s.

(Kakkou) stood beside Haji and cursed:

“Judging from your tone, you probably already know why the situation has become like this right!? Or perhaps, you're purposely setting this up so that you could find out who the traitor was?”

"It sure is disappointing; you've only managed to guess half of it! I actually already knew that (MinMin) had connections to (Mushibane) — however; it was probably because of me dumping her, which led to her betrayal. Even though we have lost a very valuable combat asset from our standpoint, it's best for us to just clean them out all at once. That's why I used her a little bit in the end."

Upon seeing the frivolous smile of Haji, (Kakkou) could not help but frown.

In other words, despite Haji being knowledgeable about the situation, he still chose to become the bait for this dangerous mission. Not to mention he especially handed (MinMin) over to the enemy, just so that she could be used as a pawn to gather all the enemy forces to one location. Should he be considered as brave or just simply cunning? Nonetheless, his plan is really good. Judging by

his capabilities, he could easily obtain a position within the Central Headquarters— However, it seems like the brass of the Central Headquarters are well aware of his capabilities; and that's why they purposely appointed him to a position elsewhere right?

Or could it be that the people from the Special Environmental Preservation Bureau was hoping for a stalemate between them and (Mushibane)?

(Kakkou) groaned to himself in his heart.

"Haji… What exactly are you planning? Just like before, with your speech about (Fuyuhotaru), I really don't have a clue as to which of your words are true; not to mention that research— or something…"

"No need for you to be concerned about it. For now, everything is going according to my plan. Although there are still some issues that I am a bit concerned of!"

"(Namie)'s situation seemed to be a bit… Ah whatever, this matter can easily be investigated. You do not need to think about it too much, and now since (MinMin) has left the organization, please put in two to three more times the effort to fill in the gap!"

"… Now I feel like rebelling as well…"

"Haha, I know you would not do that! You still haven't fulfilled your promise with (Fuyuhotaru) yet, right?"

After hearing that, (Kakkou) could only remain silent.

And because of (Kakkou)'s appearance in the battlefield, a loud yet calm voice suddenly rang through.

"(Kakkou)….you again?..."

Although the voice was suppressed, it still sounded very clear; (Kakkou) turned to face the opponents in front of him.

Surrounded by the Special Environmental Preservation Bureau personnel, was a group of people of varying sizes, the only special trait that they shared, was that all of them were wearing white masks resembling the visage of a wolf or a fox or other animals, covering the region around their eyes and noses. The scene

of them standing beneath the sunset gave off a supernatural feeling.

At the center of the group of white-masked individuals, a figure with a dog mask could be seen. The figure was the only one seemingly unfazed by (Kakkou)'s sudden appearance and did not panic like the all others. Although the face of the person could not be seen, judging from the voice and their body figure, this person should be a girl in her teens. With her beautiful shoulder length hair, and her clear voice— even if she didn't intend to, she was very eye catching.

"Good timing, I intend to kill you along with that spectacled guy!"

The masked group began to gather around the teenage girl in the center.

"Hey, Lady…who is that guy? He seems to have fused with his (Mushi)…?" [TL note: rather than calling her Ladybird, her comrades call her Lady]

The teenage girl named (Ladybird) answered her white masked comrade's question with a look of hatred.

"That guy is (Kakkou), everyone probably has heard of him before right? His (Mushi) is different from our Minion type, it's a Fusion type— a very special type."

"Ka…(Kakkou)? That's him?"

The white masked group suddenly began to riot.

"Lady, since our objective has already been achieved, you should retreat. Let us divert (Kakkou)'s attention!"

The dark-brown-haired male, that was wearing a fox mask, quietly said near (Ladybird)'s side.

The young lady glared at the teenager in the eyes.

"Do you think that I will lose to him, Centi?"

"No that's not what I meant. It is just as you said before; (Mushibane)'s purpose is not for combat, but to save more Mushitsuki right?"

"That is correct. But (Kakkou) is different, you may not know this, but many of our comrades have been turned into fallen because of him."

(Kakkou) diverted his attention away from (Ladybird) who was continuing her

argument, and looked at little girl beside her. She was the only one among the masked group that did not have a mask on.

“That kid over there is the reason behind this battle?”

Upon hearing (Kakkou)’s short question, (Ladybird) moved the little girl behind her back.

“That is right. For the sake of saving her mother who almost fell down the plaza stairs, she used her (Mushi). Yet her mother ran away from her after that, and started saying something about how her child was a monster, whilst running away faster than anyone else."

(Ladybird) bit her lip.

“Why…Why did this child have to go through such a thing? Is it because she is a Mushitsuki? She is the flesh and blood of that mother! Surely this kind of treatment is just too much?...”

“Haha!”

Haji’s laughter rang throughout the plaza.

"From the country's perspective, Mushitsuki are just a nuisance; monsters with insane combat abilities… Even though the existence of Mushitsuki still have yet to be revealed outside this country, it is only a matter of time before news of it gets out. And if the existence of these monsters becomes acknowledged to the world, it would cause unimaginable chaos within the country. In the worst case scenario, Mushitsuki will be regarded as biological weapons by other countries, and be used as a reason to justify their invasion into the country."

The teenage girl shouted back,

“I cannot believe you actually called us biological weapons…!”

"Calling you biological weapons is actually very generous, you guys are much scarier than those "actual" biological weapons. It's because you guys are not on anybody's side. Nobody knows when you will do something bad. We will eventually find out where the creators of you guys are, (The Original Three), and let (Kakkou) annihilate them. After that, all we need to do is to eradicate the existence of the remaining bands of Mushitsuki like you guys, and peace will

return to the once again. (Ladybird), for the sake of maintaining world peace, please lend us your aid for a while. So what do you think?”

The teenage girl clearly was angered— even her companions were all emitting a presence of anger.

“Are you telling us to die?”

"I never said that. As long as we kill the (Mushi), and turn you guys into Fallen, we shall be able to spare your lives— and that is why (Kakkou) and I will aim solely at the (Mushi). However, there are many people within the Special Environmental Preservation Bureau that disobey my commands... That's why… I feel that you guys should be thankful that you met me~"

“Haji.”

(Kakkou) cut off Haji’s sentence as he gave a frivolous shrug.

“What do you mean by just attacking the (Mushi) … Does that kind of thing matter? Do you know how many people have lost their homes just because of you and (Kakkou)?”

(Kakkou) could hear the sound of the teenage girl gritting her teeth.

“Even if we are Mushitsuki, we deserve a sanctuary……! But you people just keep destroying our sanctuaries one by one! We are all working hard to live….We are also very normal people……! Why do we have to die for the motif of “For the country”?! We are just using our strength to find our one place which we can call home!”

“…That’s the reason why you formed this organization of rebels?”

(Kakkou) questioned and (Ladybird) responded strongly:

“Ya! It’s just for that reason! If we could just exterminate you SEPB, Mushitsuki will be able to find a place of refuge! I can also find the place where I belong! That is my dream!”

“Ah, comrades who share the same dream, actually have to fight against one another, to bear such a tragic fate…”

Haji said softly. Even after (Kakkou) stared him in the eye, the young man still did not feel any sense of shame. He used his index finger to push up his

spectacles, before continuing:

"(Kakkou), I shall only tell you this. You do not need to fight (Ladybird) here seriously, just exchange blows with her for a bit and let her go."

"… What did you say?"

"I think I told you already. Everything is already set in stone; she has other roles to play."

(Kakkou) looked at the smiling young adult and remained silent. He was completely unable to understand just how much the man in front of him had foreseen. Perhaps the little girl, who was the reason for the battle, and the escape into this park were also part of his—

"… I will obey orders."

"You sure are dependable. People should definitely have friends who share a mutual understanding and capable subordinate. And of course, you are definitely the former."

At that moment, the bunny head girl appeared from the rear of the white-masked group.

"Finally caught up. (Kakkou) sure runs fast, it would be nice if my (Mushi) could fly longer distances."

It was the former SEPB member, (MinMin). (Ladybird) turned and asked her:

"(MinMin), are you alright? Being that guy's opponent must have been quite rough for you."

"It was okay, not that big of a problem."

"What the heck. You still haven't turned her into a Fallen yet? I thought that you had already finished her before coming here!"

(Kakkou) did not miss out on the sudden change of (MinMin)'s expression when she heard what Haji just said. The bunny head girl seemed to want to say something, but immediately gave up that thought.

Haji's voice then sounded throughout the plaza.

"All the actors seem to be here… now then, go ahead and kill each other

please! Fellow Mushitsuki.”

The sky above the park was suddenly covered by black clouds.

The goggled and white-masked groups all dispersed in an instant.

The sound of (Mushi)’s screech then resonated throughout the plaza.

(Ladybird), (MinMin), and the dark brown haired teen, that was wearing a fox mask, all charged towards Haji and (Kakkou).

“(Nanahoshi)!” [TL note: (Ladybird)’s Mushi is a seven-spotted ladybug, that’s why her (Mushi)’s name is (Nanahoshi), which means seven stars.]

After (Ladybird) shouted, a gigantic shell like creature appeared behind her. It had a semi-spherical body with a lot of swelling on its back, and on top of those were seven red spots.

(Nanahoshi) is the (Mushi) of (Ladybird) that was capable of matching up to the Kashu level one ranked (Kakkou).

That semi-spherical body that landed on the ground looked almost like a mini hill top. (Nanahoshi) spread its wings that were two times larger than (Ladybird)’s body size, and roared.

(Kakkou)’s vision was covered by the gale caused by the blast.

The cemented ground was upheaved into the air by the roaring wind, as the path struck by the gale was laid barren.

(Kakkou) and Haji immediately jumped to the side, avoiding the huge gust, yet because of the range of the shockwave being too wide, the two of them were unable to completely avoid it, and fell to the ground.

One (Mushi) was then struck directly by the blast; its whole body was spewing fluids as it was blown into pieces. A SEPB personnel who was in the distance immediately collapsed to the ground lifelessly.

Just this attack alone was sufficient enough to render one quarter of the entrance plaza into a barren field. Regardless of friend or foe, they all were stunned by its unbelievably destructive capability.

(Kakkou) then shouted to Haji as he quickly got back on his feet.

“Haji, can you just leave this area already!? You're diverting my attention just by being here.”

“Aw, don’t say that. Who do you think taught you how to use a revolver? Even though I am unable to fight (Ladybird), I can still at least be of some use … Now that I think about it, did you forget to record?”

Upon being reminded, (Kakkou) touched his goggles and pressed a button near his temple. The lens now displayed the three lettered word “REC”.

“Oh come on. I only took up this job so that I can see the instant when other people’s dreams are eaten by their Mushi.”

“… Sooner or later, will I also become a Fallen just like this video?”

“If you were to become a Fallen, it would mean the end of the SEPB, and at the same time, the time when the country will no longer be unable to control the Mushitsuki and fall into ruin. Please take note of that.”

“… …”

After the storm caused the (Ladybird)’s (Mushi)’s attack had stopped, a gigantic wall like (Mushi) had already jumped in front of (Kakkou). It was a giant centipede that spanned more than ten meters long.

“All bodyguards forward! Protect Lady!”

The fox-masked teen shouted.

The body and shell of the (Mushi), which looked that a gigantic centipede, then began to split up into several segments, and extended out like rubber. Its sharp fangs were flying towards (Kakkou), with the intent to crush him alive.

“In this battlefield, the ones who live are the victors.”

Haji’s hand swiftly reached into his pocket, and took out a revolver; it was a large barreled revolver that did not match the thin appearance of the young adult.

After that, two consecutive gunshots were fired a second before the centipede lunged forward with its teeth.

“Ugh!”

The distant fox-masked teenager suddenly bent down painfully.

The bullets that Haji fired accurately pierced through the eyes of centipede.

When the (Mushi) is affected by any injury, it will strongly affect the mental state of the Host. The brown haired teen's face twisted in pain as he pressed down on his chest.

Haji just stood there and fired his revolver single handedly— continuously firing his bullets into the joints of the seemingly tough shell. Even though the centipede was still trying to lunge forward, it was forced to retreat slowly under the precise hail of the bullets.

After the ammo was emptied out, Haji took out fresh ammunition with a simple and neat movement from his pocket. Just when the empty holder was dropped to the ground, he was already firing once again. Every time the gun sounded, the recoil of the gun would hit Haji's body, but only shallow smiles could be seen on Haji's pale face.

"Ugh… Ahhhh!"

However, the owner of the giant centipede still didn't give in, he still ordered his (Mushi) to lunge towards Haji.

(Kakkou) raised the gun that was fused with the Kakkou Mushi and took aim at centipede. With a force as powerful as the one fired from a cannon, a huge hole was blown open into the giant centipede's chest.

"Ugh!"

"Centi, stop forcing yourself! Just leave these guys to me…..!"

For the sake of protecting the teen, (Ladybird) moved (Nanahoshi) in front of the centipede. Even the slightest movement from giant ladybug's thin limbs was enough to cause quakes on the ground.

Just then, a black coated figure blocked (Ladybird)'s view.

"Die (Kakkou)!"

(MinMin)'s giant cicada beat its wings as it flew down from above their heads.

Ear piercing sound waves that were beyond the limit of human's hearing

enveloped the entire plaza.

Regardless of friend or foe, everyone let out cries of pain.

“Go die! Die!! Why must people like you be better than me… !”

As if it was responding to (MinMin)’s shouts, the cicada intensified the sound waves emitted.

Many (Mushi) with thin shells were screeching in pain as their bodies disintegrated into pieces. (MinMin)’s (Mushi)’s attack worked extremely well against the other (Mushi).

Seeing her comrades fall because their (Mushi) was killed by the ear piercing sound, (Ladybird)’s face changed drastically; she shouted as she covered her ears.

“(MinMin)! Why are you attacking our comrades?! What are you trying to do!? Stop it!”

“Ah you’re too noisy! As long as we can defeat (Kakkou), this kind of small thing does not matter!”

“Ugh... Argh…!”

(Kakkou) tried to raise his revolver as he endured the ear splitting pain; however, his hands were trembling nonstop, so he couldn’t aim properly.

(MinMin)’s attack was causing unimaginable damage to (Kakkou) who had fused with his (Mushi). The Kakkou Mushi was forced to defuse from the revolver, while struggling violently in pain.

The cicada cries now had reached its highest point.

After the cicada built up enough power, it flew towards the immobile (Kakkou) at high speeds. (MinMin) intended on taking the chance to tackle (Kakkou), who was now an ordinary human. If he was to take that hit from the cicada, it would pretty much be a fatal blow.

Regardless of friend or foe, all the (Mushi) that were in the way were knocked away by the cicada.

“Tch…!”

“(Kakkou), you really are useless! Are you really a Mushitsuki with the caliber of a Kashu level one?”

A figure came between (Kakkou) and the cicada.

It was Haji. He raised his gun and took aim at the approaching cicada.

The gunshot rang almost at the exact moment when Haji was knocked away; the cicada’s painful cry could then be heard echoing throughout the plaza.

The bullet Haji fired pierced the cicada’s wings as Haji was struck directly by the cicada, blowing his whole body to (Kakkou)’s side. Haji then spit out blood from his mouth after he stopped rolling.

“N-No!! I didn’t mean to do that … Haji-san!”

(MinMin) suddenly became flustered, and ran towards Haji.

“Why...Why did you have to save him?!”

“You are right… I was just too impulsive…”

Haji’s calm yet twittering voice was overwhelmed by the sound of heavy cannon fire.

After the cicada stopped its attack, (Kakkou) fused with his Mushi once more and fired a bullet from his revolver. The bullet hit the cicada’s chest, causing it to spurt out a large amount of liquid as it was blown away.

“Ugh!”

(MinMin) twitched as if her body was electrified.

“Keigo … san … …”

(MinMin) looked at Haji as she slowly fell over… before lying motionless on the ground.

“(MinMin)!”

(Ladybird) cried out as (Nanahoshi) released a shockwave flying towards (Kakkou).

“……!”

(Kakkou) looked at the Haji who fell near him for a moment before raising his

revolver.

Using his enhanced feet, he should be able to avoid this attack. But if he were to dodge it, Haji who was now lying on the floor would definitely be consumed by the shockwave.

— (Kakkou) really intended to save his strength, but the current situation didn't allow him to do so.

(Kakkou) focused his power onto the arm that was holding the revolver.

The antenna of the Kakkou Mushi that had fused with the revolver began to wave as its sapphire-colored compound eyes glowed brightly. The bullet in the barrel that was fused with the mouth of the (Mushi), was also giving out an ear piercing sound as it spun in high speed.

After that, a deafeningly loud cannon fire sound rang throughout the plaza. A bullet that had a high rotating speed and power incomparable to a regular bullet clashed head on with the shockwave.

In the space between the dog-masked teenage girl and (Kakkou) surged a strong and intense gust.

The shockwave that was released by the ladybug and the bullet fired by (Kakkou) intensely clashed, resulting in it being cancelled out by the other. After being interrupted, the shockwave was split into two vortexes that narrowly missed the fallen Haji.

(Kakkou) jumped past Haji, and went straight into the aftermath of the blast. He crossed the dust that was raised by the blast, and charged towards (Ladybird).

However, something charged out of nowhere and stopped his advance.

"Wooooooooo!!!" [TL: The sound of war cry…]

The fox-masked teen — Centi roared. The giant centipede stood straight up and extended its countless disgustingly wiggling feet, and sharp claws at (Kakkou) from all sides.

"No! Don't do it Centi!"

(Ladybird) shouted.

Although (Mushibane) outnumbered the Special Environmental Preservation Bureau in terms of members, there were only few that were assigned a level within the group. It was an organization that solely built with (Ladybird)'s strength as the center. There was no way that the (Mushi) of the teen called "Centi" could defeat (Kakkou).

But then —

"…Ugh!"

(Kakkou)'s chest suddenly felt an intense pain, which caused his vision to black out momentarily.

The energy used for that gunshot fired earlier must have taken more than what he expected. In this case, it was probably not his best time to face off (Ladybird) yet.

(Kakkou) dodged the incoming Centipede, which attacked from the side, and raised his hand silently.

When the remaining SEPB members received the signal, they all charged towards the (Mushibane) at once.

The sea coast park became a battlefield in an instant.

(Ladybird) clicked her tongue. Because her Mushi was too powerful, once it entered the chaos of a battlefield, she was unable to control its power freely.

However, the small shockwaves sent by the (Nanahoshi), was still able to kill the SEPB's (Mushi) one by one.

"Everybody retreat! If we were to face them head on, we have no chance of winning!"

Although (Ladybird) was shouting in a loud voice, the (Mushibane) members were focused on an intense battle with the enemy, hence were unable to hear what she said. The teenager called "Centi" was also facing a tough battle against two combat squad members, and was pushed further and further away from (Ladybird).

(Kakkou) charged in alone, and was advancing quickly through the battlefield towards a certain spot.

Upon seeing the direction where (Kakkou) was charging at, (Ladybird) spaced out for a bit before realizing what he was trying to do.

“Don’t tell me he …!(Nanahoshi), stop him!”

(Nanahoshi) obeyed her master’s command, and spread its giant pair of wings.

However, a (Mushi) suddenly came into the view of (Ladybird).

“..What!”

It wasn’t a (Mushi) that belonged to the Special Environmental Preservation Bureau, but rather (Mushibane)’s. It was (Kakkou) who grabbed the leg of a nearby (Mushi) with one hand, and threw it directly at (Ladybird)’s direction.

(Ladybird) swiftly mobilized (Nanahoshi) to release a weak shockwave. Her comrade’s (Mushi) landed nicely in front of the path where it was fired, but (Kakkou) took this chance and reached his destination.

In front of (Kakkou), a little girl could be seen —

She was the Mushitsuki that started this battle.

Upon seeing (Kakkou), an expression of fear surfaced on the little girl’s face as she walked backwards unsteadily. Just then, a flying (Mushi) that was about one meter long appeared beside her foot. The (Mushi) carried the little girl on its back, and tried to escape by gliding.

However, (Kakkou)’s speed was much faster than the flying (Mushi). After he swiftly caught up to it, he grabbed the collar of the little girl, and pulled her down from the (Mushi).

“Stop it —“

(Kakkou) could hear the screams of (Ladybird).

Yet (Kakkou) did not stop. He threw the little girl onto the ground without hesitation, and pointed his gun at the defenseless head of the flying (Mushi).

“Stop it!”

(Ladybird)’s scream sounded at the exact same time as the heavy gun fire.

The little girl who wanted to get up suddenly twitched for a moment before her body froze like a corpse, and like a slow motion clip, slowly dropped to the

floor.

"… Mama…"

(Kakkou) felt as though he just heard the faint whisper of the little girl. And beside her face, which looked as if she was praying, a small droplet of a tear fell onto to the floor…

A sudden silence enveloped the entire park.

"Forward."

(Kakkou) gave a short but clear order to the members of the Special Environmental Preservation Bureau.

The remaining forces of the black coated group looked as though they just came back to their senses, and launched a full scale assault on the (Mushibane). On the other hand, (Mushibane) was clearly shaken.

But before the battle started, a mutter was heard echoing throughout the battlefield.

"…Why……"

The SEPB members all stopped in their tracks at the same time.

"Why did you have to kill that child's (Mushi)?! (Kakkou)!"

(Nanahoshi) roared.

The air surrounding them vibrated violently— all the Mushitsuki remained still as if they were stunned.

The (Mushibane)'s leader – (Ladybird) was glaring hatefully at (Kakkou); a tear could be seen forming beneath her mask.

"Why did it have to be that child? That child…that child she… is not even part of (Mushibane) or the Special Environmental Preservation Bureau, she was only a small… yet why did you have to …!"

(Kakkou) glanced at the remaining band of comrades. Even though they regained their morale for a moment, after seeing how the expression of (Ladybird) became serious, they all lost their will to fight.

(Kakkou) gazed silently at (Ladybird).

“Look at the current situation.”

“What...What do you mean?”

“That girl was with the (Mushibane). That is the reason why I turned her into a Fallen. It was to set an example for the future, that way, people will know what will happen to them if they were to come in contact with you. Anyone that is related to the (Mushibane) — will be turned into a Fallen. That way, there won’t be any Mushitsuki willing to assist you guys anymore.

— *(Fuyuhotaru) was also the same.*

Deep inside his heart, (Kakkou) added that line.

“Just for this… this reason…?”

(Ladybird)’s attitude took a drastic change as she said in a weak voice:

“Just this reason alone, was enough to turn her into a Fallen? To take away her dream? Using all of your comrades as bait, and your enemy as a shield, just so you can take everything away from such a small girl…?”

“Please do not misunderstand, the Special Environmental Preservation Bureau never intended to uphold justice. We are just a bunch of people banding together in order to protect our own dreams, and are willing to do anything in order to do so. That kind of game…being the ally of justice— you can play on your own.”

“… What do you mean…”

“However, we are definitely going to live longer than you guys.”

(Ladybird) raised a mocking smile.

"So long as you have yourself it's enough, am I correct? Why do you think in such a way… You already have people that are slowly forgetting their dreams, and are afraid of being devoured by their (Mushi) beside you… And since you've become a Mushitsuki; it means that you have a dream as well, right? Yet you—"

“There are currently five level one ranked Mushitsuki.”

(Kakkou) suddenly blurted out this unrelated issue:

“And I know who these level one ranked people are. (Ladybird), you among the

five are the weakest.”

This line made the teenage girl reach her boiling point.

“I am going to kill you……”

(Nanahoshi), that was behind (Ladybird), spread open its huge wings; everything in the surrounding area suddenly began to vibrate before turning into dust.

“I am definitely going to kill you! And after that I will create a place where Mushitsuki belong!”

As if it was responding to the anger of (Ladybird), (Nanahoshi) beat its wings intensely.

However in the next instant, the dark browned hair teen in their sights suddenly collapsed on the ground.

“Ugh…Argh… …!”

(Nanahoshi) immediately stopped its movement.

“… Centi?”

“Arghhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!”

The fox-masked teenager cried out in pain.

His (Mushi) suddenly stood facing the sky, its thin and long body started twisting violently, while it’s countless feet struggled desperately. Its six eyes were also glowing with a deep red light.

The erratic movements of the giant centipede seemed to imply that it was in pain, but it looked as though it was dancing ecstatically. And quite a few (Mushi) in its vicinity were knocked away by its wiggling feet.

“That’s impossible…? Unless…”

(Ladybird) muttered silently as she stared at Centi.

Meanwhile, (Kakkou) clicked his tongue, and held his revolver tightly.

“Damn it…It is actually “Maturing”!“

Everyone in the plaza panicked when they heard (Kakkou)’s words.

Centipede continued to howl. It was giving out cackling noises, while extending out its hundreds of feet. The spikes that were on top of its thick shell dug away the cement ground, while smashing the nearby (Mushi) into pieces.



Maturation —

The (Mushi) would consume the dreams of its host piece by piece. Every time the host would call upon the power of the (Mushi), they had to sacrifice a portion of their dream as its price. As a result, those individuals who became Mushitsuki would slowly forget their dreams and lose their way. In addition, if a (Mushi) were to be killed during this time period, although it could prevent the death of the individual, the Mushitsuki would turn into a Fallen due to their dreams having been greatly devoured; resulting in the loss of all their emotions and cognitive abilities.

So what if the (Mushi) had managed to consume all of the dreams of its host, what would happen?

That is Maturation.

When the (Mushi) has managed to consume enough of the host's dream to reach a level that it could evolve itself, the (Mushi) will first of all rebel against its master. It will then leave the host and become a matured (Mushi). Afterwards the host, who was drained until he had nothing left of him would— die.

“How can this be…It’s a lie right? Centi……”

(Ladybird) slowly moved closer towards the teen that was already curled up and clutching onto his chest.

(Kakkou) gritted his teeth.

The total combat strength of the remaining members is just too little…

“If he were to fully mature, it would be disastrous. First squad! Move behind that guy’s back and go all out on it before it fully matures.”

A number of members followed (Kakkou)’s orders and moved behind the back of the evolving centipede.

However—

With a howl, every member that went behind was knocked into the air; none could dodge its attack.

The sharp claws of the centipede, which looked like dancing whips, extended out several meters all the while cutting through the air. The members, who were

knocked into the air, all spurted out huge amounts of blood from their body.

Everyone who witnessed this carnage froze.

“……!”

Even (Kakkou) couldn’t hide his expression of shocked.

If he remembered correctly, the (Mushi) of the teenager called “Centi” was assigned with a Kashu level nine rank. He is one of the few Mushitsuki within (Mushibane) that was ranked a level.

—There had been very few cases of ranked Mushitsuki maturing in the past. Although (Kakkou) had witnessed the maturation (Mushi) a few times, they were mainly the (Mushi) of unranked Mushitsuki. Even so, to repel a matured (Mushi), required at least three ranked Mushitsuki.

If he were to fully focus fire on the enemy, (Kakkou) would probably not lose to it. But the risk of this gamble was just too much, and now was not the time to be choosing such a method to deal with the situation.

“… (Ladybird)!”

(Kakkou) called out to the dog-masked girl:

“We can only rely on the both of us now; if we act any slower, it will be too late!”

However, (Ladybird) remained unresponsive to (Kakkou)’s call.

She grabbed onto the shoulders of the dark browned hair teen and called out to him feebly:

“This..This cannot be true right? Centi, you cannot go on like this…Didn’t you say you wanted to go overseas and rescue many different kinds of people… Answer me!”

“(Ladybird)! He’s already done for! Hurry up already!”

(Kakkou) shouted out to her as he commanded the remaining members to charge towards the centipede.

Centi‘s slowly dimming eyes caught a glimpse of their shadows as they ran towards him.

Just then, long sharp claws rained down on them.

The SEPB members were unable to dodge its hundred claws, and thus were pierced one by one. Although every member used their (Mushi) as a shield to avoid fatal injuries, they were unable to get up ever again.

“…Ugh!”

Even though (Kakkou) relied on his nimble reflexes to dodge the attacks, he was unable to escape unscathed, his coat was torn as fresh blood was oozing out from his skin. Just avoiding the attacks was already very tiring for him, hence he was forced to maintain his distance between himself and the teen.

(Kakkou) took aim with his Revolver without any other choice, and fired at the centipede in a distance.

A loud gunshot rang throughout the clouds.

Quite a number of the centipede's feet were blown into pieces, yet there was no direct hit on its body. It seemed that the only way to deal with it was to get closer, or to raise the firepower of the revolver, however no matter whichever method he used, (Kakkou) would probably not be able to escape unscathed.

“Arghhhhhhhhhh!”

Centi’s cry and the centipede’s roar sounded at the same time. Even the (Mushi) of his fellow comrades from (Mushibane), were cut down by the dancing blades.

“Centi…You need to pull yourself together, Come on…”

“(Lady), run away …I…Don’t think I can hold on much …longer…! Hurry up and escape…Otherwise my (Mushi) will…..”

“What the hell are you saying, there’s no way I could do that ...”

“(Ladybird)! That guy is done for! Give up already!”

Enduring the pain, (Kakkou) shouted at (Ladybird).

(Ladybird) turned to face (Kakkou).

“But...If we were to do that, Centi will become a Fallen…”

“If this goes on any longer, he will die!”

“But...”

“…As long as he still lives, there will definitely be a day where he can be saved!”

(Kakkou) shouted.

If he were to take the chance of the giant centipede going berserk and aim at Centi from afar, he should be able to land a direct hit right. This way, the (Mushi) would lose its host and disappear into dust before it could fully mature.

However, (Kakkou) was only focusing his attention at the centipede in front of him. Four years ago, ever since he pointed his gun at (Fuyuhotaru), he had vowed that from then on, no matter what people say, he would only attack the (Mushi).

(Kakkou)’s shouts were mostly overwhelmed by the roars of the centipede, but (Ladybird) seemed to have heard very clearly. The dog-masked girl widened her eyes.

(Kakkou) inputted more force in all his holding hand. The centipede had already become a foe that could not be dealt unless he uses full strength.

“(Lady), escape quickly… Since I am like this, let me deal with that bastard…If it’s the (Mushi) that I have now... I can definitely…”

The guy called Centi pushed the dog -masked teenage girl behind him as if he wanted to protect her.

(Kakkou) then gazed at Centi in the eye; before saying:

“If you continue to do this…You will die.”

Upon hearing (Kakkou)’s warning, Centi responded with a smile:

“It is alright…As long as Lady is safe… (Mushibane) will definitely destroy you SEPB, and create a true sanctuary for us…”

(Kakkou) remained silent as he looked at (Ladybird) who was behind the teenager.

The teenage girl shrugged her shoulders. She was completely different from the person earlier who was giving off an overwhelming presence in her fury.

(Kakkou) sighed as he put his revolver back into his holster that was inside his

coat; also the green and black spots, there were starting to become clear before, slowly disappeared.

“(Kakkou), what are you trying to pull…! Come on and face me!”

“Idiot woman, you are taking forever to make your decision…”

Centi frowned before turning around surprisedly.

(Nanahoshi) was spreading its huge pair of wings behind (Ladybird).

“Lady…?”

“Centi, I am sorry… I have caused you so much trouble……”

Although (Ladybird) wanted to smile, she just could not bring herself to do so.

“Just wait a moment… I will save you immediately…”

(Nanahoshi) released a giant shockwave and blasted the giant centipede into pieces in an instant.

After convulsing for a few moments, Centi collapsed to the floor lifelessly. Meanwhile, (Ladybird) turned away and avoided the sight; she could not bear to see the look of the fallen Centi. She clenched her fist as her tears wet the dry cement beneath her.

“Dam it….Dam…”

After everything had come to an end, the center of the sea coast park, returned to its peaceful state once again. A long shadow was cast over the remaining Mushitsuki.

Just then, a droplet of rain fell onto the ground in the center between (Kakkou) and (Ladybird).

Unknowingly, besides (Kakkou) and (Ladybird), everyone else was lying on the ground.

Some people collapsed due to their injuries, while there were also some who collapsed unscathed. The latter was probably due to their (Mushi) being killed… but, the majority of the people were defeated because they were trying to take down the Matured (Mushi).

“…What the hell is this…”

The silently surveying (Ladybird) said quietly as more and more rain drop drenched her hair.

“(Kakkou)…What the hell is this ……?”

(Kakkou) remained silent, and stared at the teenage girl in front of him.

“Why do only Mushitsuki have to suffer such treatment? Why do we have to come across such a terrible thing……We are also ordinary people…Just because we all have a small dream, we are targeted by (The Original Three)… Are our dreams that special? Are they really so amazing that our dreams must come to such conclusion? We were only trying to fulfill our dream and pursue the things we wanted …”

“That is why I say you are weak.”

(Kakkou) coldly responded

“You’re only thinking about hating the treatment you received, fearing (Mushi) while hating other people. You are scared, so scared that you cannot control yourself. Afterwards you only think about pushing the blame onto someone else.”

(Ladybird) glared at (Kakkou) in the eye.

“What is wrong with being scared of (Mushi)? If we are going to die eventually, after our dreams are devoured, of course everybody will be scared! Yet, you said that I am pushing the blame onto someone else? It sure sounds really nice to hear, but if it weren't for you guys…isn’t it all because of you people taking away our homes, and forcing us into despair trying to escape endlessly from the eyes of others?! Yet, you guys are… the same as us… all of us are Mushitsuki…”

“Ha, don’t group me together as you lot.”

(Ladybird) came closer to (Kakkou) who was mocking her, and grabbed onto his coat forcefully.

“How are we different from you guys?... No, aren’t you guys the ones who are more underhanded? You guys are just a bunch of people who not only fear the government, but also are willing to serve those underhanded people within the government!”

“I don’t deny that, we actually are those sorts of people.”

(Kakkou) silently accepted the scolding of (Ladybird), which made the teenage girl even angrier.

“You mean to say that you are different? That you do not fear (Mushi), or even other peoples' impressions of you?”

“I am not afraid…”

(Kakkou) calmly yet clearly responded.

(Ladybird) could not say anything and let go of his coat.

“Nothing is scarier than that…”

“…What is “that”?”

“You don’t know? That is why you are weaker than me”

(Ladybird) gritted her teeth, and shifted her sight away.

“I don’t understand it! I don’t understand a damn word you are saying! I also don’t want to know!”

(Ladybird) threw this sentence before leaving in the rain.

“Next time, I will definitely finish you off…..If we continue to let “Outsider” see this, I would really explode.”

“You noticed? I think it must be Ume again…you are not taking your comrades with you?”

(Ladybird) tightly clenched her fist; one could tell that she was trying to hold back her anger.

If she were to take the fallen comrades back with her, she would have to fight against (Kakkou) once more. And if this happens, the SEPB reinforcements would definitely come and push (Ladybird) into a dead end. If the situation really turned out that way, she would have wasted the sacrifices that her comrades made, in order to allow her to escape.

The dog-masked teenage girl walked towards the fallen Centi, and said some words to him as she kneeled down. (Kakkou) could hear “… I am sorry.” That probably was not a simple farewell; she really seemed like she wanted to save

Centi.

“If it were (Fuyuhotaru)……”

(Kakkou) muttered behind (Ladybird)’s back.

The scene four years ago flashed in his mind.

That girl was crying in front of him who had his revolver raised. Yet, the girl was not afraid of him, or the (Mushi); she was just weeping clear tears, while smiling —

“If it were her, she probably might have understood….That person already knew, what truly was terrifying….”

(Ladybird) bit her lip, and got up.

“I heard from (MinMin) regarding the Intel on this Mushitsuki called (Fuyuhotaru). We will definitely find her, and rescue her. Afterwards, we will save all our comrades that were turned into fallen. (Kakkou), before that, you better remember this……!”

(Ladybird) threw that line at him, and ran off immediately after as the rain was getting heavier. (Nanahoshi) shrunk down to the size of a balloon and followed behind its owner.

(Kakkou) did not intend to pursue (Ladybird) at all.

That was because Haji ordered him to let her go.

After (Kakkou) could no longer see the silhouette of the teenage girl, he moved through the plaza.

After crossing the field, that was filled with smell of the melting Mushi, he walked towards two figures that were lying on the ground.

He lowered his head to look at Haji, who was completely unconscious, and (MinMin) who had fallen beside him.

Just then, the silent (Kakkou) felt the presence of someone approaching.

“(Kakkou), you sure are powerful!”

The moment when (Kakkou) looked back, a small sized figure appeared, standing beside the fallen tree.

The figure’s hair was not only particularly bright from being drenched by the rain, even his big eyes looked like watery.

With a child-like face that looked innocent, it was hard to tell what gender he was. The left sleeve of his jacket and his right trouser of his pants seemed to be have been torn off, as he had tied a leather belt around that area. In such cold weather, a figure like him showing off an their immature arm and leg was rare.

“On the other hand, (Ladybird) is still just as weak…I think, that even I can beat her at her present state!”

That figure who was unidentifiable in gender said in a clear voice. However, his tone didn’t have any intent of underestimating (Ladybird); but rather it brought a sense of loneliness.

Kusezaki Ume.

(Kakkou) only knew that this guy is one of the members from Harukiyo’s group, which was under surveillance by the SEPB just like (Mushibane). However, (Kakkou) had no intention to report the appearance of Ume, to the SEPB, even if was to Haji.

“Ume, are you secretly watching again? Even (Ladybird) found out.”

(Kakkou) said in a serious tone.

His word caused Ume to bite down on his lip, before he replied with unhappy expression.

“If I could, I really wanted to talk in the open with (Kakkou) and (Ladybird).”

(Kakkou) diverted his gaze from Ume, and looked at the two people fallen on the ground once again.

“Well, since you heard the Intel regarding (Fuyuhotaru)… help me pass a message to Harukiyo.”

(Kakkou) said towards the teenage boy behind his back,

"Do not interfere in my matters. I haven't been taking any action because you guys have only been watching from the sidelines in the past; but if you really intend to take action against (Fuyuhotaru), I will treat you guys as enemies."

“I got it; I will pass the message on to him.”

Ume immediately replied in an innocent manner.

“However, the final decision is still in Harukiyo’s hands! Because, no matter how you put it, we can’t just leave a Mushitsuki that recovered from the Fallen condition alone! Even (Ladybird) said so… For now it is still unclear whether (Fuyuhotaru)’s (Mushi) has revived, right?” That means, Mushitsuki still have a chance of becoming normal humans again, right?”

Ume’s voice seemed to contain a hard to suppress anticipation.

“Being a Mushitsuki as well, there is no reason for me to just leave a person with such a solution alone after learning about it. Even if it is (Kakkou), you won’t be able to fight against (Ladybird), and deal with us at the same time right?”

“…”

“Your words seem to be contradicting your actions, no? Aren’t you supposed to be uninterested in (Fuyuhotaru)? You even tore the documents; in that case, why does it matter whoever gets her to …”

Before he could finish, Ume suddenly shut his mouth. It was probably because he noticed (Kakkou) was clenching his fist.

“I am sorry… Are you angry?”

“No I am not, you brat!”

“You are indeed angry! I think I better leave here before I get beaten up. Bye bye (Kakkou)! It would be great if we could see each other alive once more.”

See each other alive once more— when (Kakkou) heard this line, he subconsciously inputted more force into his clenching fist. Being a Mushitsuki, there was no way he could guarantee that he could meet him alive once more.

Kusezaki Ume disappeared without a trace, just as he had appeared.

“……”

Just then, Haji sounded a slight groan near (Kakkou)’s foot. It seemed like he was about to wake up

(Kakkou) then looked at (MinMin) who was beside Haji. Although it seemed

that she was looking at Haji; her pupils were akin to one of the dead.

“(MinMin), Get up.”

(Kakkou) said.

Afterwards, (MinMin) got up like it was nothing. She didn’t even look at Haji, just stared straight at (Kakkou) with her pale empty eyes. A Mushitsuki who had lost all her emotions, with traces of tears on her eyes, was standing there.

“You know where (GARDEN) is right? Lead the Fallen here to the “EAST-33” area.”

(Minmin) made no response to (Kakkou)'s instruction, not even a confirmatory nod— but instead silently turned her body, and walked near the fallen Mushitsuki's side.

Mushitsuki with their (Mushi) slew would turn into a Fallen that had neither dreams nor emotions. Although their body will not have any changes, they will only obey commands from the outside, and because they have no desire, as long as they are not given any commands, they will starve to death or lose their lives due to other causes.

Once a person became a Fallen, they would be unable to get back any of their emotions.

That was what people in the past had thought.

(Fuyuhotaru)—

“That idiot…why did she return to Ouka City…”

(Kakkou) looked up towards the raining sky, the raindrops was blocked away by the goggles as it turned into water droplets and slid down his face.

The SEPB would never let off any Mushitsuki that had recovered from the Fallen state. With this in mind, Harukiyo and the (Mushibane) also shared the same situation. The longstanding balance maintained among the three, is now about to be broken. And the cause of this was (Fuyuhotaru).

—My dream is … to find a place that allows me to stay… a place where I belong…

During these past four years, (Kakkou) had never forgotten that timid voice. (Kakkou) then recalled the figure of that petite girl whom was assigned the title of Ishu level one because of her powerful ability.

“Wouldn’t it be better if we had no dreams? That way… it might be easier for us …”

Nobody could answer the quiet whisper of the teenage boy.

Chapter 2.02: Shiika Part 3

Shiika was running toward the park's exit as Daisuke's last expression began to surface in her mind.

He probably thought that the reason Shiika had pushed him away was because of her denial, which caused his expression to suddenly fill with sorrow.

Just then, she heard weak shaking sound from somewhere around her neck; she realized that it was coming from her (Mushi).

She turned to gaze at the crystal clear insect landing onto her shoulder. Although its outer appearance was that of a firefly, its eight legs were pure-white instead. The four compound eyes on top of its head, was enough to prove it wasn't any of those nature insects that ever existed.

"I really …… can't return to being an ordinary human anymore? … …"

With tears in her eyes, Shiika bit her lips.

She initially thought that – maybe she still had the chance to …

Even though the anxiety couldn't be fully erased, she just could not help but to hope within her heart– Maybe it was possible to return to being an ordinary human again. That way, there might still be chance of staying together with Daisuke –

But right now, even that shallow hope had been shattered to pieces.

"If you were still around … why didn't you show up earlier then?? That way, I wouldn't have to…"

Shiika said with a hoarse voice, while gazing at the (Mushi) perched on her shoulder

A pure white firefly, the (Mushi) that had infected Shiika.

Shiika is a Mushitsuki.

That moment when Daisuke grabbed Shiika's arms, Shiika's (Mushi) appeared unknowingly on top of Daisuke's shoulder; its eyes were shining in a bright red

color. A sudden uneasiness that arose within Shiika caused her to push her (Mushi) away.

Although Shiika originally had wanted to explain, she stopped when something within whispered to her:

Whether justified or not, the result will still be the same …

It wouldn't matter if Shiika was exempted this time or not; because as long as Shiika stayed by Daisuke's side, he would sooner or later, find out the truth. As long as Shiika is a Mushitsuki, the truth would never change. And by the time Daisuke found out, how would he react to it?

— If they really exist, then I wouldn't want to come across any of them.

His words pierced through Shiika's chest painfully, like an arrow.

She was finally able to meet someone like him, and even thought about getting along in the future… But knowing that she could no longer meet him was just … too lonely…

No matter what, the fact that she is a Mushitsuki would never change. Even after awakening from the state of Fallen by some unknown reason, it hadn't change at all.

"Ah …."

A line of tears rolled down from the corner of her eyes.

The sudden tears caught her by surprise.

— *Why am I crying?...*

She quickly wiped her face with her coat's sleeve.

She didn't understand why she was crying for a person that she had just known for merely a day.

It was also the same feeling yesterday night when she called Daisuke. That time, she was just so lonely that she couldn't help it but want to listen to his voice. And after she heard Daisuke's voice, that feeling had calmed down unknowingly.

The unbearable pain echoed back and forth within Shiika.

If she could no longer see Daisuke anymore, then there was no more reason for her to stay in this city, but…

Daisuke-kun —

Shiika murmured softly within her heart.

Not being able to see you again… I don't want that —

"… !"

After arriving at the east exit, she suddenly stopped.

Near the entrance of the exit, there were many men wearing black suits wandering, staring at the exiting pedestrians with sharp eyes. And at the place that was closer to the exit, a group of reporters that had armbands on the side of their arm could be seen shouting:

"I heard some Mushitsuki appeared in the park, is that true?!"

"Stop lying and saying that this was some sort of new virus, we're tired of hearing that! Why won't you just acknowledge the existence of (Mushi)?!"

"According to an official's statement, the purpose of the Special Environmental Preservation Bureau was to seize and further control cases that involved the (Mushi), this fact was also –"

The group of men in black suits pushed the shouting reporters away from the park entrance. In addition, there were some within that group that wore mechanical goggles that covered their faces.

Shiika took a deep breath, while hiding in the bushes. She originally thought that her location in the park had been leaked… but that didn't seem to be the case.

Those goggled people suddenly surrounded the entrance when the crowd got louder.

Taking the advantage of the noisy crowd, the goggled figures surrounded the exit. And behind them, a group of men who carried rifles behind them could also be seen, cloaked in camouflage; they all seemed to be waiting for something to appear.

“ … ?”

Even though Shiika didn’t understand what was going on, she could still tell that her current whereabouts hadn’t been exposed yet. Which in this case, hiding in the bushes until those people left would probably be the best plan.

The white firefly sounded a small flapping sound as it landed on the leaves of the bushes, gazing silently at the goggled figures with Shiika.

As Shiika gazed at the goggled figures, and white firefly that was near her cheek, she couldn’t help but remembering the face of the boy she met four years ago.

He had called himself (Kakkou); a member of the Special Environmental Preservation Bureau.

— “Your dream is just like mine…”

Even though his goggles made it hard for her to see his expression, Shiika could feel that the boy in front of her, (Kakkou), was a very staunch person. It seemed like he was enduring something painful, and yet still trying his hardest at the same time.

Despite the fact that they only met once, the memory of that moment had become irreplaceable to Shiika.

It has been four years already… What is he doing now? Is he still protecting our dreams?

Even though they talked only very briefly four years ago, Shiika still remembered how those short moments had made her happy; even under the situation of knowing that her (Mushi) would be killed by (Kakkou) shortly after. She just couldn’t help but feel close to the boy in front at that time; a feeling of similarity as if they shared similar dreams.

Shiika then noticed that she was smiling very naturally, despite the fact that she was crying just a moment ago … She startled at her sudden change of attitude.

“I also want to meet (Kakkou)-kun again …”

After a while, a droplet of rain fell on Shiika’s cheek. As she raised her head at

the sky, the rain suddenly got stronger. The firefly that was perching on the leaves flew inside Shiika's coat for shelter from the rain. The cold rain drenched Shiika's short hair, while soaking into her inner clothes. The freezing air pierced her trembling body, yet Shiika stayed in the same spot, not moving in the slightest.

Just then, the group of goggled people suddenly became flustered.

"(Ladybird) she's — coming — "

Among the rain, the shouting from those black suited men could be heard as those goggled and camouflaged people immediately retreated back to the entrance of the forest, as if they were waiting to ambush someone that was approaching.

If that person is their target, then that person is undoubtedly a Mushitsuki right?

The goggled group quickly disappeared from Shiika's sight, in order to prepare for their ambush.

Even a powerful Mushitsuki wouldn't make it if they were ambushed by these many people.

A strong tension embraced the surroundings. This moment would probably be her best chance to escape since the SEPB's members were focused on the upcoming Mushitsuki. If she ran in the opposite direction, she would be able to escape.

But that Mushitsuki who was approaching would definitely be defeated. A Mushitsuki that didn't belong to the SEPB, with a situation very similar to Shiika.

What should I do? —

The sound of a water puddle being stepped on was then heard by Shiika, whom was pondering at what to do while hiding in the brushes.

A figure that seemed like a young teenage girl with her face covered by a weird white mask, a bit taller than Shiika, could be seen running to the exit from the opposite direction. The teenage girl had probably hid her (Mushi) for the moment, that's why there wasn't any monster looking creature around her.

The teenage girl quickly ran past Shiika, who was hiding in the brushes. Although she was alert of her surroundings, she hadn't noticed the enemy group that was hiding on the other side of the entrance. The teenage girl didn't slow down a bit, planning to get closer to the exit. At the same time, Shiika saw many shadows starting to wriggle behind the other brushes.

Shiika's body started moving ahead of her thoughts.

"Please—Please help her!"

The white firefly floated in front of Shiika, slowly expanded its small body in the midair followed by a cracking sound, while exuding a pure white aura around. The surrounding area started to change due to its effect.

One piece, two pieces … Pure white snow fragments were interspersed between the rain drops, falling down from the sky. Shiika noticed that both the white-masked teenage girl, and the goggled people that were planning on rushing out from the brushes, were stunned by the sudden change.

The slightly shimmering snow soon surrounded the exit area.



“[Shatter…]”

Shiika’s voice was polluting the surroundings like the sound of a bell. However, that sound didn’t come from Shiika herself, it came from the white firefly that was emitting white auras. And then the ground began to rumble.

And after a set of rumble noises rang, the ground where the goggled group stood began to crumble away. And because of the sudden loss of their footing, the goggled figures frantically ran away from the white-masked teenage girl, who stood in the spot stunned.

After shrinking to its original size, the pure white firefly returned to Shiika. At the same time, the falling snow began to disappear as if they were an illusion.

After Shiika had confirmed the safety of the masked teenage girl, she jumped out the brushes and ran deeper into the forest; Purposely avoiding the exit.

“Wait a second! You……”

The voice could be heard behind her, calling out to her, but Shiika didn’t stop. Even though Shiika knew that the teenage girl wasn’t her enemy, she felt that it would be best for them not to meet each other since she was being targeted by the SEPB right now.

After running through the forest, Shiika slowly dashed onto a slope. And judging from what she saw, she could tell that the place was probably the end of the forest; a fence could be seen in front of her, but -

“… …!”

Just then, several people wearing goggles appeared from behind the fence. Perhaps they were patrolling the area? They were shocked by the sudden appearance of Shiika.

“What? A girl … …?”

“Is she one of the (Mushibane)? — ”

But before they could finish their sentences. A whirlwind-like shockwave swirled by Shiika’s side, and attacked the goggled people. The shockwave completely destroyed the fence, and further swallowed the SEPB’s members along with ground they stood on. And since neither of them could resist against

such strong shock wave, they all got blown away.

At that instant, something grabbed Shiika's hand.

"Okay, let's escape now!"

The white-masked teenage girl suddenly appeared from behind, followed by a gigantic ladybug that Shiika had never seen before. The giant ladybug that just finished its job was gradually shrinking its body.

"Move! Now!"

Shiika was dragged along by the teenage girl without being given a chance to protest.

The two of them jumped over the broken fence and ran along the quiet and dark road.

Despite the fact that there was a huge crowd in the road ahead of them, they still didn't stop. Many pedestrians would purposely turn around and gaze at the white-masked teenage girl due to their curiosity. However, the teenage girl didn't stop until they arrived at an open space not far from the city center.

Coincidentally, this place was the exact same place where Shiika and Daisuke met.

The rain subtly stopped.

"Hoo… Ha… Sorry, we just met and I'm dragging you everywhere…"

The teenage girl panted while leaning against the side of a construction vehicle.

This caused Shiika to become stun for a moment, gazing at the teenage girl. She couldn't help but to giggle after recalling what happened yesterday morning.

"Eh… What is it? Did I say anything strange??"

"Ah …… Sorry …… It's just something like this happened before, I couldn't help but …"

The teenage girl stared at Shiika's profile for a bit before she went "Oh -", then looked away uninterestedly. She then took of the white mask, revealing her true identity.

Ah, what a beautiful person—

That was Shiika's first impression of the teenage girl in front of her. Her age was almost the same as Shiika's, but she carried a totally different atmosphere. Although her slender eyes gave out a feeling of mischievousness, it also gave out a very gentle impression. Shiika felt that… she would probably look very scary if she was pissed.

"Well whatever, now I returned the favor that I owed… It was you that saved me before right?"

Shiika hesitated for a second before nodding.

"Ye… Yes"

The teenage girl smiled, a very innocent and natural smile that one could barely even relate with her recent battles with the SEPBs. The teenage girl reached her hand toward Shiika.

"I'm Tachibana Rina, You?"

"Ah …"

Shiika didn't know what to do.

The teenage girl named Rina frowned.

"Don't want to say it?"

"No… It's not"

Shiika shook her head.

"I'm Anmoto — Shiika."

Shiika finished by holding onto Rina's hand. Her hand was warm; a sense of comfort could be felt just by holding it. There was even an urge of wanting to hold onto her hand forever.

Rina narrowed her eyes happily and smiled again. Another natural smile with no intention other than trusting Shiika. Shiika could not help but look away with a blushed face.

"Shiika right? Just call me Rina. And you don't have to talk so politely!"

“Ah … Yes — Mhm …”

Shiika nodded while thinking about the conversation she had with Daisuke, she couldn’t help but laugh a bit.

“… What is so funny?”

Rina stared at Shiika with a slightly unhappy look. Not of anger, more like a child’s random jealousy. She sure is a girl that’s filled with many emotions.

Shiika quickly shook her head.

“Sor…Sorry. Because… it really felt similar to the previous…”

“Oh —”

Rina responded skeptically, but smiled as she continued:

“Well, it’s quite rare to see a girl that can smile happily like you!”

“Eh?”

“Ah, I meant in term of Mushitsuki. I have seen many Mushitsuki in my past, but it’s actually my first time seeing someone that could smile this frankly and cheerfully like you…”

Right after Rina finished her sentence. The smile disappeared from Shiika’s face, as she looked down while clenching her lips.

“I’m not … happy at all.”

“Is that so? But …”

Before Rina could finish her sentence, her facial expression suddenly became grim as she turned to the bushes behind, staring straight at them.

Shiika felt confused, and asked Rina:

“What … What’s wrong?”

“There was someone … No, sorry. I might be too concerned.”

When Rina turned her head, she had already returned to her normal expression. She smiled cheerfully and asked in a mischievous tone:

“Probably it’s because Shiika is too cute, so maybe there are stalkers following you around? Well, even if it weren’t stalkers, there should be a lot of boys hitting

on you right?!”

Rina’s remark made Shiika remember Daisuke. Could his actions be considered as “Hitting On”?

However, just by thinking about Daisuke, her chest would feel the throbbing pain, causing her to bit her lips and lowered her head.

Rina didn’t speak for a moment as if she was lost in thought, but then she suddenly asked with a grin:

“Perhaps, the person that you said you met during your “previous encounter”, was someone that could make you smile happily like that?”

“Uh … no …”

“A boy??”

Shiika’s face flushed red immediately. Rina then exposed a teasing smile.

“What really?! Just as I thought. But, are you guys in a fight?”

“Not … a fight …”

“Ahh, I see. Are you … worrying over the fact that you’re a Mushitsuki?”

Shiika widened her eyes, while Rina gave out a sigh.

“I see how it is… but to be honest, what you’re doing now is really pointless. Even a reason like being a Mushitsuki should not stop us from meeting the people we want to meet, you know?”

“But …!”

Shiika could not help but arguing:

“But, if I meet him, I will put him into trouble! And if he finds out, he will be afraid of me …… I don’t want that …”

“That kind of thing should not matter!”

“ … Eh?”

Rina looked at Shiika who was gradually lifting her head up, and smiled brightly.

“It’s simply no big deal! So what if we’re Mushitsuki? If we die without even

doing the things we want to do the most, then aren't we just living like insects? Since we can't change the fact that we're Mushitsuki, then we got to do what we want to do before it's too late…"

Even though Rina's tone sounded easy going, her remarks were filled with indescribable compassion. Perhaps, that was what she concluded after seeing so many Mushitsuki whom didn't get to fulfill their wishes in the end. No, it might be that she's overlapping her own experience with Shiika's situation.

"Moreover, no matter what everyone else says, we are normal people … … Of course, we will want to meet people that we want to meet …"

Shiika bit her lips.

"But …"

"Mhm— Shiika is so kind!"

A soft touch started to embrace Shiika. A warm feeling arose from the depths of her body, it slowly warmed up her frozen body that was seeped by the cold rain.

Rina hugged Shiika tightly, and whispered softly into her ear:

"Your concern about causing other people trouble, was more important to you than your own feelings, right? I'm a little envious of you … since I could never think in the way you do."

The teenage girl spoke in a lonely tone completely different from before.

"… That … that's not true."

Shiika raised her head in order to gaze at the teenage girl who was hugging her tightly.

"Rina is also very kind … … I don't know how to describe it, but you're worried about me, even though you just met me … and you give a warm impression!"

Rina exposed a startled expression. Although she tried to respond with a bright smile, it backfired into a wry smile.

" … Am I really? Ahh~ I don't understand myself anymore."

Rina kept going with a lonesome laughing tone:

“Nevertheless, what I’m trying to say is that, the things you hate, you would hate them no matter what; and same goes for the things thing you love! No matter what happens in our future, it should never be as painful as it is now … … Whether for Shiika … or him.”

“…”

Shiika’s chest began to throb lightly once more.

Rina let go of Shiika, and then pointed her index finger directly at the part of Shiika’s chest that was in pain.

“Love is love, that feeling can’t be changed. If we have to suppress these feelings within, then would there be any future for us? If so, wouldn’t we become just like those monsters that harm others?”

Rina smiled, this time showing a mature smile, different from the bright smile she had shown before.

“Shiika, you also want to meet that person, right?”

Shiika clenched her hands tightly.

“Mhm!”

“If that’s case, then there shouldn’t be any more problems! You know how to contact him right? Do you have a cell phone? If not, I can lend you mine. Meanwhile, I’ll go around to buy some juice, so you should take this chance and flirt with him as much as you want, happy young girl~!”

“Fli…Flirt…… !?”

Rina left the area after handing her cell phone to Shiika, whose face was red like a tomato. But while Shiika was looking at the cellphone, Rina suddenly stopped and turned around before asking:

“Hey, what is your dream?”

That moment, Shiika felt startled by the sudden question, but answered immediately with honesty:

“I … want a place. A place that allows me to stay, a place where I belong.”

Rina smiled.

“Pretty similar to mine!”

“Eh …?”

“I’ll create one for you— I’ll create a place of belonging where Shiika can live happily in. It’s a promise then!”

The teenage girl winked and disappeared from Shiika’s sight.

Shiika stood there in silence, not quite understanding the meaning behind those words. But she immediately came back to her senses, and looked at the cell phone. Even though she had only dialed it once before, Shiika had already memorized Daisuke’s cell phone number so well that she didn’t need the note anymore.

Shiika then pressed the numbers without any hesitation.

“Ah … Daisuke-kun? Uh … Umm That… Sorry about before …”

In the open space that was shrouded by the shadows of the night, the voice of a teenage girl that was full of joy and demure echoed softly. In the night sky, one could see a glimpse of the bright stars shining through the cracks of the clouds; knowing that Christmas was coming in two days.

Chapter 2.03: The Others

(Kakkou) said to Haji who was in the driver's seat.

The high-class car that two of them were sitting in was parked at an abandoned factory on the outskirts of Ouka City. Wild vines could be seen growing rampantly on top of the exposed steel.

From under a street lamp, (Kakkou) looked up at the night sky.

It was already late in the night. And since the rain from earlier had stopped, the night sky of Ouka City was filled with stars.

"(Kakkou), you got something on your mind?"

The light-hearted voice came from the driver's seat behind the unopened window. A young adult wearing a pair of broken spectacles showed his usual smile.

"Right now, this kind hearted big brother is free to chat with you."

Judging from the actions of this person now, it was hard to believe that he was the same guy who had fainted on the ground earlier. Although fainting was already a normal issue to him, it was still kind of hard to understand that.

"We've already come this far, what's there to be worried about?"

Haji did not seem to mind the words of (Kakkou) that was filled sarcasm, and continued: "No, you must be worrying about something. Let me guess, it must be about (Fuyuhotaru), right?"

In an instant, (Kakkou) remained silent as he stared at Haji.

"What exactly is being researched at (GARDEN)? It must be something you cooked up, right?"

"Who knows? But by letting (Mushibane) listen to that, they'll probably believe in it right? They will probably think that (GARDEN) must have some secret that could return Mushitsuki back into ordinary humans."

Haji's tone was rather cheerful. Every time when he had a devious plan going

on in his mind, he would speak in this manner, whilst (Kakkou) would always end up manipulated by him unknowingly.

"… Exactly which part is your plan? Just like before, why did you tell me to let (Ladybird) go —"

"(Fuyuhotaru) was in the park earlier."

Upon listening to Haji's straightforward answer, (Kakkou) could not help but be shocked.

"What……."

"That girl who was the reason behind our battle, it was my intention to let her flee into the park and bait (Mushibane) into rescuing her. Once (Ladybird) escaped, she would end up meeting (Fuyuhotaru). However, (Ladybird) wouldn't have realized that the one she encountered was indeed (Fuyuhotaru). Up till this point, everything was all going according to my script— Oh, that's right; (Fuyuhotaru) is still a Mushitsuki. Not only did she recover from the Fallen status, even her Mushi has revived."

(Kakkou) couldn't figure out the intentions behind Haji's actions, and felt rather annoyed. He had already expected (Fuyuhotaru) to be unable to return to being a normal human, so he was not too shocked from that. But regarding the meeting between the leader of (Mushibane), (Ladybird), and (Fuyuhotaru) being a part of Haji's plan, he was unable to accept it. If two level one ranked Mushitsuki joined together, there would be no hope of winning for the Special Environmental Preservation Bureau.

"Judging from your expression, I guess you're afraid of the fact that both (Ladybird) and (Fuyuhotaru) met up right, (Kakkou)?"

Haji gave a smile and talked as if he just seen through what (Kakkou) was thinking: "I already said it in the park, (Namie) has been keeping watch over (Fuyuhotaru), she can mobilize at any time. Although this does not mean that we can detain (Fuyuhotaru) at this moment, that Ishu level one –Ah that's right, this time her rank has been changed to Hishu level one. Anyway, she's just too powerful. Even if we had mobilized you; you might not be able to win. If we let her move on her own, she would definitely be more cautious of her surroundings, making it even harder for us to find a loophole."

After (Kakkou) listened till this point, he was finally able to understand the Haji's intentions.

"… So by letting her become friendly with (Mushibane), and after she lets down her guard, we then come up with a way to separate her from the flock, is that right?"

"That is correct! Once somebody has friends, they will unconsciously rely on them, and show their weakness afterward. As long as we exploit this weakness, I think we will be able to win even without you. Afterward, by losing (Fuyuhotaru), the disorder in (Mushibane) will grow bigger, giving us the chance to attack while they are lost. Isn't this a brilliant plan that kills two birds with one stone?"

"Will it be this successful?"

"Probably not."

Haji replied bluntly, despite his happy smile not changing one bit.

"There will always be miscalculations in any matter, but how will that affect us? As long as you and I are both there, we can overcome any difficulty. I always think of plans that will allow us to win without losing either one of us, and we are progressing through one now. As long as you can carry out your job and come up with results, it will suffice. I really hope that you could bring me the results of being the inspector for (Ladybird) a little faster. Say, have you located (Mushibane)'s stronghold yet?"

"I told you I'm still not used to the job of an inspector!"

"Since you can still argue, that means you have yet to put more effort into it!"

Haji let out a bored laugh, and took a glance at (Kakkou) who was leaning against the car.

"However, regarding the matter of tearing up (Fuyuhotaru)'s Intel, you sure did lose out! The girl in question has changed so much over these four years; she's now so cute that you could barely tell it's her. If we put it in terms of education level, you could say it's the change from a grade schooler to a high school student! Of course, since there's so much change, I felt that it should be given a look!"

Upon hearing the young adult saying that, (Kakkou) asked,

“…Why was (Fuyuhotaru) able to awaken from the Fallen status?”

“That is of course, the result of the research being done at (GARDEN)!”

“……..”

“Okay, okay, I apologize; don’t stare at me like that!”

Haji raised both hands in the air as if he was admitting defeat, and laughed in response: “Based on the current situation, it is hard to come to a conclusion. Since she is a Mushitsuki that has a lot of irrational factors in her, and in this case, there was indeed someone that helped her. We still have not found out who the culprit is, but there is a possibility that there is a connection between that person and (Fuyuhotaru). However, if we look at it this way, it is easier to understand that this case is the result of many irrational factors. That includes the method of recovering from the Fallen status; so far there have not been any methods of bringing a Mushitsuki out of it. But as long as we get our hands on (Fuyuhotaru)… and push it to the limit, there is a chance that we might be able to obtain some information.”

The car rang with a loud bang as Haji pushed his seat backwards.

“(Fuyuhotaru)… She was indeed a very difficult first mission for both of us.”

During the first meeting between him and (Fuyuhotaru)…for some reason, (Kakkou) was just unable to pull the trigger.

Only till recently…he began to have this feeling of enlightenment.

Maybe their (Mushi) was able to sense that the both of them shared the same dream…

(Kakkou) did bring up this issue with Haji once. After hearing the “Promise” that was made between the two, he laughed sarcastically.

— No wonder she was just as strong as you.

“Nevertheless, because of that mission, I was able to obtain my current status. Whilst you fulfilled your dream of finding a place of belonging where you would be needed, right?”

(Kakkou) smiled wryly and replied:

“Being needed and being used are two different things….”

“They are the same, but, if you really want to differentiate between the two….”

Haji stopped halfway, and coughed violently all of a sudden. (Kakkou) tried to look back at the interior of the car, but because of their surroundings being too dim, he was unable to see Haji’s expression. The young adult’s profile under the street light seemed to be weaker than usual, and judging by the way he was coughing, it showed clearly that this was not the result of the battle earlier.

“….Oh, I forgot to pass this to you.”

(Kakkou) stretched out to press a button on his goggles, and after a quick “sliding” sound, a small card popped up from it. Haji smiled after he caught the disc.

“Did you really forget to? I guess you never intended on handing it over right from the start?... Right, I shall give you something as a return gift.”

“What is this?”

“It is the Christmas present that I intended to give to my most cherished person, but because of her body condition worsening, naturally I was not able to put this into good use… However, she seemed to have been looking forward to it.”

(Kakkou) looked at the object in his hand. It was a letter about the size of a postcard. In one corner of the letter, there was a ribbon attached.

(Kakkou) thought about it for a while, and placed the letter into his coat.

“Is her condition really that bad?”

“The same as always. She’s still bedridden like how it always been. She thinks that her symptoms are due to some simple illness whilst consuming my dreams to live. I’m grateful to God for allowing her to be born blind. Or should I say that I am grateful towards the beautiful (Oogui) for giving her the ability to survive by letting her (Mushi) consumes the dreams of others.” [TL note: the translation was not wrong, it was author’s miscalculation. Because in volume 2, it

explained/redirected that it was not (Oogui) who turned his most “cherished” person into Mushitsuki but rather (Shinpu)]

Haji’s words were filled with even more sarcasm than before. The emotions that he was trying to hide in those words were probably even deeper than what (Kakkou) had thought.

“……If the Intel of her (Mushi) was spread, it would be a big issue indeed… Even if she is a Mushitsuki that does not give birth to others despite eating their dreams, her Mushi is still the same as (The Original Three) in the sense that it is able to consume the dreams of others.”

“That’s not a problem; she only eats my dream anyway.”

“And you make use of the videos we get to increase your own dream, am I right…?”

“That is correct, it is “Resentment”.”

The reflection of the young adult from the rear mirror showed there was a change of his gaze in an instant. He raised the disc given to him by (Kakkou) and stared at it.

“Every time, when I see the dreams of others that contain their bright futures shatter to pieces…… A feeling would rise within me; it felt as if I was rebirthed.”

“……”

“I will make use of this “Resentment” and feed her; she has become the sole purpose of why I continue to live. Do you think that there is any other relationship that could be this close? The reason why I never reported her issue to the higher-ups was also because of this. Nobody can stop us.”

“…You are crazy.”

Haji laughed at (Kakkou)’s response.

“You’re not any better! For the sake of finding a place where you belong, you have sacrificed countless Mushitsuki. You can’t possibly think you’re normal, right?”

“…I do feel at times that I want to die.”

“To me, that is an everyday routine.”

(Kakkou) who was leaning against the car, and Haji who was sitting in the driver’s seat. The two of them stayed where they were silently for a while without moving an inch.

“Sometimes I do think about it….”

Haji then whispered.

“If only I was god…that way, I can grant everyone’s dreams in the universe. Maybe you’ll laugh at me, but I really do believe, and hope that everyone in this world can achieve the same happiness.”

(Kakkou) laughed.

“But we are not gods!”

“Yes, we are just a bunch of weak and hollow human beings. For the sake of protecting our most precious things, we can only struggle endlessly.”

“Or linger on as best as we can…that is our only strong point.”

(Kakkou) said as he breathed out all the air that was stored up inside his lungs. He walked away from the car while looking at the white clouds shrouded in the darkness of the night.

“(Kakkou), we must win, we cannot lose, both of us have dreams that we cannot lose. For the sake of fulfilling those dreams, we must make full use of what can be used, just like how we used (Fuyuhotaru).”

Upon hearing Haji’s words, (Kakkou) stopped in his tracks. He looked back at the black high-class car, and replied half-jokingly: “Hey, what exactly are the (Mushi)?”

Facing the mirror in the front, Haji returned to his normal talking manner and shrugged his shoulder.

“No idea, a person as ordinary as me is incapable of comprehending it. However …”

“However?”

“From the Intel that I had obtained from taking a sneak peak at the Central

Headquarters' database, (Mushi) seemed to be a failure resulted from an unknown experiment that was done by unnamed researcher. That's to say, although there is no evidence to base it upon, it's just like how people's lives flicker about quickly; like travellers coming and going from an inn. If we were able to capture (The Original Three), then we might be able to find out the truth."

(Kakkou) was dumbfounded by his unexpected response.

"Even though it's like that, I think that most of this is just false Intel. Since the Central Headquarters is the head of a coward organization, if we do not gather something for them to hear, they will probably be restless. And even if this piece of Intel is true, there is no meaning to it."

Haji leisurely smiled and said,

"Even though I really do wish that the truth was like this. But, to living creatures that are as hard to kill as humans, there probably won't be any opponent that cannot be beaten right? The (Mushi) are nothing more than that, only an unusual opponent."

Chapter 3.00: Shiika Part 4

The only thing she could remember from back then was the beginning of a conversation she had with a woman, whom was wearing round sunglasses.

“Hey, could you tell me your dream?”

It was a tall figured woman wearing a crimson red coat. Her mouth showed a calm smile, while she gazed leisurely towards Shiika.

The sudden question coming from a complete stranger made Shiika stagger.

Shiika was still young at that time, preparing to grow her hair longer, just like her sister’s. Shiika was walking home from her elementary school as usual; in a road over the sparsely populated residential area stained by the bright orange sunset.

“Don’t be afraid, I just wish to know. Because … you have a rather delicious dream, but you’re stopping in place instead, hesitating to move forward.”

Shiika didn’t understand exactly what this woman in front of her was talking about. She was not sure whether she should run away or not, but even so, her body couldn’t move, as if it was locked to the ground. No, perhaps there might have been some sort of power blocking her actions.

Shiika’s lips slowly opened, the stare of the woman was making Shiika’s body move on its own.

“My dream is …”

— When Shiika regained her consciousness, something had already lodged within her.

It was not long after Shiika became a Mushitsuki that she was targeted and hunted by the SEPB.

She had nowhere to hide, so she ran throughout the whole town. Those people, whom covered their faces with weird goggles, came to assassinate her one after another. Shiika somehow managed to survive their attacks and during

the process, Shiika understood that it was the woman, named (Oogui), the person capable of producing the Minion type Mushitsuki. She was the one that turned her into a Mushitsuki. In addition to (Oogui), there were two other Mushitsuki capable of producing other types of Mushitsuki; hence, they were called (The Original Three).

And then, when Shiika had no energy to escape further, she met a boy named (Kakkou). In retrospect, through Shiika's eyes, the presence of (Kakkou) standing on the snow was filled with dignity, along with sorrow. His appearance that year was imprinted deeply within her memory; even after this four-year period.

Shiika suddenly awakened in response to her body's jittering.

The first thing she saw when she opened her eyes, was the unrecognizable ceiling. In a room that was surrounded by pure white wallpaper, there wasn't any other furniture other than the bed Shiika was lying on.

After groping through her blurry memories, Shiika finally remembered what happened the night before.

Right after Shiika and Rina met, she went to Rina's residence under Rina's invitation. Rina seemed to be living alone in a quite highly ranked apartment.

Yesterday, Rina had also briefly explained to her the status of her organization, (Mushibane), a resistance group composed by many Mushitsuki. Although Rina invited Shiika to join, Shiika said she needed time to decide. So then Rina joked: "Well I figured! If someone like Shiika joined, then there will be nothing to worry about!"

Shiika still hadn't told Rina, about the fact that she was locked down by the SEPB. She was not concealing it deliberately, but rather, missed the opportunity to specify her current situation.

However, Shiika's desire to leave this city as soon as possible hadn't changed, but the fact she had no place to go and no money to spend, made her accept Rina's offer to settle at her place for now, until her situation is more stable. She would then part her way after properly thanking Rina for what she had done for her.

Shiika walked out of the room wearing a pair of pajamas that Rina lent her. An

aroma was wafting toward her from the other end of the hallway.

“The other areas … … Hotaru … … Southern district leader “Efemera”? … … I don’t want to get him involved… … Fusion type?” [TL note: original Note from Author; Efemera (The Japanese translation for Mayfly) , which also known as (Ephemeroptera), is an insect similar to Dragonfly, also called [planktonic].]

Shiika could slightly hear the sounds of a conversation, but she could only hear the voice of one person, a phone conversation perhaps?

“Ok, tell Efermera to standby for now! Other areas … no, can you get the leader of the Western district here? After all, they knew about Centi’s situation…”

The sound was discontinued after that last sentence.

“Mor… Morning…”

Shiika walked shyly into the living room, while Rina welcomed her with a smile.

“Morning — slept well?”

Rina put down her cellphone, as she stirred a pot of miso soup. She wore an apron outside of her school uniform.

“Ah … … S-Sorry, I’ll help you.”

“Don’t worry, it’s all right. Why don’t you sit down first?!Just a second, breakfast is almost ready.”

The way Rina served the food was so quick and precise that Shiika realized she would only be a nuisance if Rina let her help.

“Oh… Okay.”

Shiika sat on chairs of the dining table according to Rina’s instruction, while looking around the living room casually.

Even though the room was spacious, only everyday furnishings were around, such as a table and a TV. The walls were covered by canvas, and pens and paints used for painting, were scattered all over the floor. Every painting that could be seen was unfinished, and almost all of the paintings were landscapes; not a single portrait. Each of the paintings however had a magical charm, able to

attract people's attention. The majority of the colors used was tending towards red— a burning red hue to be precise; as if the sun itself was attached to the painting.

“I've been meaning to ask since yesterday … … Rina, do you always do your paintings here?”

Rina put the empty plates down on the table, while she answered Shiika’s question.

“Nah, mostly in school. Although the environment here is nice, somehow I am able to stimulate my imagination better in school… … As such, I always do my paintings there.”

“Is that so …”

“Ah, it’s just a simple hobby; I’m not being that picky about it!”

Despite the fact that Rina was referring to them as a simple hobby, Shiika could still tell from the level of her paintings, that they were simply beyond the level of “simple hobby”. But Shiika didn’t mention it, and asked something else instead.

“Are you … … going to continue painting then?”

Rina eased her expression a bit.

“I still have other aspirations, so... I don’t have enough time to continue.”

An expression of realization was craved on Rina’s face. Shiika probably knew what her objective was.

“To go against the SEPB… right?”

Rina responded Shiika’s question with a wry smile. It seems like whenever Rina felt troubled, she would give that wry expression.

“I’m really simple, right? I can only think about revenge … an eye for an eye. It's because they deprived so many people’s places of belonging, so I’m going to take them back. This issue is more important than anything else right now.

Rina’s tone was very straightforward, without the slightest hint of confusion. But during her speech, her line of sight didn't face Shiika even once.

Then Rina… what about your place of belonging then? —

Despite Shiika wanting to ask, she didn't say it because Rina had already walked in the kitchen.

"It's finished! Applause please~!"

Shiika followed Rina's instruction and started clapping her hands, making a *Pa, Pa, Pa* sound.

On the table, there was the Japanese style meal consisting of grilled fish as main dish. Both the look and the smell were impeccable. Shiika was rather surprised because Rina didn't seem capable of doing any housework.

"Go ahead and try."

Shiika picked up her chopsticks and said quietly under Rina's urge.

"Itadakimasu…"

She first tasted the pot-stewed vegetables from a small plate, and it was as delicious as she expected. Due to Shiika not eating anything since yesterday, the warm breakfast's distinctive flavor made her really pleased.

"It's really delicious… "

"Well, duh. I filled it with my love! Nyaa —"

"Lov… Love…? Nyaa —?"

"There is more, so eat as much as you can. Oh! You're going to meet your boyfriend in the afternoon, right? So you better fill your body with nutrients then. Ah! I'll lend some clothes for you to wear later on."

"He is… He is not my boyfriend!"

Rina looked at Shiika, whom was shaking her head with a blushed face, deliberately sighed dramatically.

"Oi Oi, Who's this lucky boy that is able to get such cute girlfriend like you? Anyway, you have to be more careful; there are a lot of terrible guys in this world. For example, the kind that acts like a good boy in order to please others! Or a self-centered idiot, who is strong and mean at the same time … and so forth."

Rina drank her miso soup while complaining. Shiika looked at her expression, and suddenly figured something out.

“Rina likes that type of people?”

Rina sprayed out the miso soup she had in her mouth, coughing with a blushed face, while staring at Shiika.

“You… Ah, how did you come to such conclusion?!”

“S-Sorry… I just thought it might be …”

After seeing Rina’s sudden fierce attitude, Shiika back down timidly.

Rina started at Shiika, while wiping her mouth with a tissue.

“Those types of people that I just told you, one of them is my enemy! He is a Mushitsuki from the SEPB’s, called (Kakkou), that son of a bitch! How the hell could I like him?!”

Rina noticed that Shiika was displaying a weird and confused expression, so she began to question things.

“Shiika, what is the matter? Do you know him?”

“No … I don’t…”

Shiika quickly shook her head. She was surprised at herself for lying.

“Well, I thought so too, it’s impossible for you to have met him anyway. Since almost all of the Mushitsuki that met him were defeated and became Fallen.”

“Ri… Rina do you hate that person?”

“Of course!”

Rina’s expression suddenly became serious. Since her eyes were, by nature, filled by a strong will; whenever she thickened her senses, her surroundings would gain a heavy atmosphere.

“That guy… only that guy… I definitely will not forgive him! Many of my comrades became Fallen because of him. If it wasn’t for him, we might have already found our paradises …”

“…”

Shiika listened quietly to Rina's words.

Four years ago when Shiika and he met, she didn't feel that the boy was such terrible person.

"However, there is another guy that's completely different from him."

Rina's expression was slowly easing down; she exposed a complex look of a "bit troubled and a bit shy".

"He is a classmate of mine. He doesn't have any outstanding features, nothing good or bad about him …… However, a few months ago, I saw his expression when he got serious. The look he had that time was totally different than the easy-going look he usually has… How should I put it, it was as if he was a total different person…"

Rina smiled. The furious expression she was exposing just a second ago had disappeared, and she continued to describe the boy's details shyly. She didn't seem to notice the sudden change of speed in her speech.

"Is he great?"

"No… I don't mean that…. …! Argh, how should I put it… it's like a feeling of me wanting to paint him down, like a portrait."

"A portrait of him?"

"I'm surprised at it myself. I never had that kind of feeling from just seeing a person."

Rina turned her head away shyly from Shiika with a shallow smile.

"Oh—, Rina is smiling so happy too!!"

Just when Shiika said that line with a smile, Rina's expression suddenly darkened.

"But it's impossible… That person and I are living in totally different worlds."

"Why? Didn't you say it yesterday? Even if we're Mushitsuki, there's nothing to worry about."

"No, Not that … … It's not related to whether we're Mushitsuki or not."

Rina shook her head and said:

“…I killed my father.”

Shiika widened her eyes upon hearing that. A look of disgusted emerged on Rina’s face; an expression different from the time Rina had when she mentioned (Kakkou).

“My father was the worst. He would pretend to be a gentle father to the outside world, but at home, he would just beat up my mother every day, for no reason. He was rich and powerful, so I couldn’t run away even if I wanted to. In my memories from elementary school, I could only paint the sceneries I saw through the window, in a room that had nothing in it, not even a TV. For my mother, it was as if she only existed to endure his fists or something. As such, ever since I matured, the only thing I could think about was killing that guy.”

Rina’s voice was calm as she went on with an icy tone.

“When my mother passed away, I was sure I would be his next target. To die like my mother who didn’t do anything, to die without gaining anything… … I didn’t want to die that way. So I wanted to kill him before he killed me. Once I decided that, I became a Mushitsuki.”

Rina tittered and said:

“That feeling was hard to put into words, the whole thing happened when I walked by her, as if it was a coincidence. The moment when that strange woman with a pair of round sunglasses stood in front of me, I suddenly felt my senses fading away; then by the time my senses came back, I could tell that something was living inside me … … In short, it felt as if I was divided into two, and then the other part of me flew away. The first thing I did once I became a Mushitsuki, of course, was to kill that bastard.”

“Rina … …”

“In the end, his good luck made him survive, but he can never wake up again. I pushed him into a never ending abyss.”

“…. … Rina, Stop it… …”



“I obtained power, a power that will not let anyone trample upon me, or let me lose to anyone. This time I will use my power to defeat the SEPB. That’s right, they are the monsters, I will never let those guys … …”

Shiika could no longer hold on to herself anymore and hugged Rina tightly.

Tears fell down Shiika’s cheeks. Because Shiika was looking at Rina ever since she started to mention her father, the corner of Rina eyes immediately turned flush. Although her tone was calm, she had been crying the whole time.

“Rina, really … … don’t say it anymore … …”

Rina didn’t make any sound in Shiika’s arms, she just smiled quietly.

“So I … don't have the right to stay by his side.”

Rina’s voice sounded very lonely, but was also filled with tenderness.

“Whenever he spoke to me … I felt very happy. I think he still hasn’t found out? Ever since I found him smiling while looking at my painting, I have been paying attention at him, so I really don’t want him to find out the real me … …”

“That’s not true.”

Shiika said.

“He is the person Rina likes right?! Then he should be able to understand you.”

“Maybe … he might”

Rina moved a bit away from Shiika, her face was showing a frank smile. Shiika believed that the Rina, whom was smiling, was also hoping for it from the bottom of her heart.

“However, I still have something to do. And it is not related to him, who’s living a normal life; so forget about that matter for now. After all, I have received new relevant intel.”

“Intel?”

Compared to Shiika’s face, which was filled with surprise, Rina was smiling instead. She collected the dishes and stood up.

“(Fuyuhotaru).” [TL: 冬蛍, Fuyuhotaru, the English translation of the kanji would be “Winter Firefly/Snow Firefly”.]

Shiika’s heart skipped a beat.

"I heard it from a member of the SEPB. (Fuyuhotaru) is a male…or a female? I don't know actually— but if we could find him and make him one of our allies, then we can definitely discover the way to awaken from the Fallen state. Not only that… we can also learn the location of the "Isolation facility"; which is the place where the SEPB take the Fallen to, from (Fuyuhotaru) as well.

Rina’s eyes were shining with hope, while she said with a strong tone.

“Then, that way, I can finally rescue the comrades that became Fallen! And it will be time for us (Mushibane) to win against the SEPB, and create our place of sanctuary. In order to do that … … I have to find him no matter what.”

Rina continued with a rave tone while smiling.

“Perhaps… Shiika, you’re (Fuyuhotaru)?”

“I-I…”

I don’t know the method to awakening from the Fallen state —

Rina stared at Shiika, whom was thinking about what to say, and relaxed her expression. She carried the dishes and walked into the kitchen.

“Just kidding, I don’t think things would happen this easily. And to be honest, I don’t think that Shiika is that strong anyway!”

Shiika stared at Rina’s back, speechless.

Chapter 3.01: The Others

“...Phew!”

After Rina finished replacing the canvas sheet, she took a deep breath.

The blinding sunlight of the morning entered the sparsely populated art classroom. The shaft of the pencil in Rina’s hand was shining as it reflected the sunlight; placed on the table in front were a flower vase and an apple which were being used for modeling purposes. It has been quite a while since Rina drew still objects, but she felt that today the drawings would turn out rather good.

She sat on a wooden stool, facing a snow white long canvas that had nothing drawn on it yet.

—It’s the first time I said it out.

There was nobody that she confided her past to in the past, but yet she told everything to Shiika.

It was definitely because of the fact that both of them shared the same dream. The reason they were so similar was due to the illogical reason that they’ve lost the place they belong in, and are people who intend on finding a paradise where they could live in peacefully one day.

God, this is the first time I am grateful towards you—

Rina whispered quietly in her heart; this totally didn’t suit her style. In the past she had never expected she would actually meet someone who shared the same dream.

It is because of the meeting with a teenage girl with the same dream that caused Rina to remember the important things that she had slowly forgotten.

Although her dream was diminishing, Rina had something she needed do at all costs. Her true wish was to accomplish this task.

Afterwards, she could only pray that the people left behind would be able to find a place where they belong. This way, Rina can proudly say, “She has

truthfully lived in this world before—”

“For the sake of fulfilling this wish, no matter what the cost, (Kakkou) must…..”

Rina unconsciously said it out.

The words of the man called Haji rang in her mind.

— Ah, comrades who share the same dream, but have to fight against one another, and suffer because of it, what a tragic fate it is… …

Stop talking nonsense!

Rina’s expression immediately became serious.

That (Kakkou) actually shares the same dream as me? He also wants to find a place where he belongs? How can that even be possible! That guy is the enemy, and not to mention a nuisance, a cruel and unforgiving existence.

Only after defeating the spectacled guy and (Kakkou) could Rina and her comrades truly achieve victory. For now there was probably no one else who could replace that cunning man, and that Mushitsuki who is said to be strongest. It should be like this, there was no mistaking it. Up till now, Rina had never come across such a knotty Special Environmental Preservation Bureau member before.

“Next time I must win…”

While saying it halfway, Rina’s vision suddenly became distorted. The pencil in Rina’s hand was dropped to the ground as well.

“… Ugh …”

The flower vase in her vision started distorting as a light headed feeling began taking over her consciousness.

Just then, an image of her mother who was crying silently as she wrapped her arms across Rina’s body suddenly flashed through.

Next was the image of her furious father approaching her, then the face of her classmate Kusuriya Daisuke, followed by Shiika whom she had just met yesterday, then (Kakkou) who was raising his gun; and a giant ladybird with its countless glowing eyes—

Because of a sudden sound, Rina came back to her senses.

She turned towards the door, and noticed a familiar teenager was standing there shocked.

“… Ah… Kusuriya…?”

“Are you okay? Your complexion seems rather bad…”

Rina shook her head lightly to get rid of the dizziness, picked up the fallen pencil, and moved her vision away from the approaching Daisuke; once again facing the canvas.

“You got something up? Today is a school holiday you know?”

“…Of course I know that today is a holiday! I went out today to take care of some errands, but when passing by the school, I felt like coming in to have a look. I never thought that Tachibana-san would actually be here. Do you come here to draw even if it’s a holiday, Tachibana-san??”

“It’s none of your business.”

Rina said coldly, and started drawing the outlines of the flower vase. But because the feeling of the pencil that she had while drawing earlier had disappeared, she was unable to move her pencil like how she portrayed it in her mind. Daisuke’s sudden appearance caused Rina to lose all her concentration in a flash.

“If you are alright, that’s fine. You don’t seem to be in a good mood, guess I better leave first.”

"Hey, uhm... Wait ..."

Rina said unintentionally as Daisuke was just about to get up and leave the classroom.

"What?"

When Daisuke turned back, it caused Rina to feel even more troubled. It was her that called Daisuke to stop, but she just could not think of a reason for her actions.

“Erm…that…if you have nothing to do, how about sitting here for a while! Since you came here already, I will let you observe for free!”

“I totally don’t have a clue about what you are saying, but since I have nothing to do… However, before that matter I am indeed quite free, so might as well. Since you were breaking the rules in letting me observe for free.”

Although Daisuke was a bit suspicious, he still moved his chair to a place where he could see Rina’s canvas sheet clearly.

Rina could feel Daisuke’s eyes looking in her direction, and was finding it difficult to remain calm. Although her hand was continuously moving on its own, she had no clue whether the one being drawn at the moment was the flower vase or the apple.

Rina continued to look forward, not intending to let Daisuke see her expression, and talked. For the sake of preventing Daisuke from finding out her anxiousness, she continuously moved her pencil and said quietly,

“Since it’s rare to have such an opportunity…how about you sit over there…”

“There?”

“That would be in front of me, the front; FRONT…I have already drawn this vase before so it’s kind of boring to draw it again. Since I feel like drawing a human figure, would you be willing to be my model? I feel like taking up the challenge, if I were to draw a person like you, would I complete it first? Or would I break my pencil first?”

Daisuke remained silent for a while. And after a few minutes, he replied hesitantly:

“I got some errands to take care of in a while…so, I would have an hour at most…”

God, I feel like thanking you again—

“It’s okay, since I don’t have that much time anyway. Give me a minute; I’m going to get a fresh new canvas from over there.”

Rina got up from her seat and walked into the storeroom without even looking back at Daisuke once. She then hurriedly combed through the storeroom in order to find a blank canvas, while making it as quiet as possible so Daisuke wouldn’t notice. And very soon, she luckily found what she was looking for.

When she came out from the storeroom, Daisuke had already neatly put away the flower vase and the apple. The guy who normally gave people the impression of being a blur doing this kind of thing sure was surprising even to Rina.

“You…You don’t have to do that… I should be the one cleaning up those things…”

“It’s alright, I don’t mind helping you clean up these things. Not to mention, you looked rather under the weather today.”

Daisuke smiled as he said.

Rina, at a loss for words, could only silently return to her seat. She suddenly thought of Shiika’s face. If it were her, she probably would be expressing her gratitude honestly right now…

“Okay, you can go over there now… No need to remain still on purpose, just relax and stay seated!”

“Like this?”

Daisuke followed her instructions, and sat in front of Rina at a slanted angle, and got ready his pose.

Rina silently moved her pencil on the canvas; her hand was so nimble that it was shocking. After drawing out most of the outlines, then step by step, drew out the face, neck, and shoulders of the teenager.

When Rina looked at the drawing seriously, she noticed that the number of “OK” band aids on Daisuke’s face had increased by two. But the most important thing to note was the presence of the ordinary Daisuke, which caught more of Rina’s attention. Regardless of grades, athletic ability, appearance, personality, he was just a guy that had no special talent in and out, not to mention he did not have much of a presence in class as well, that kind of him was radiating a sort of — out of this world feel today. He seemed to be thinking about something… that’s right, he was showing the same unique expression Rina saw a few months ago.

Rina’s pencil strokes became faster; she wanted to depict Daisuke’s figure onto the canvas as accurately as possible. The figure of the current teenager in front of her was the one that attracted her attention after all.

“… Actually…”

Daisuke suddenly opened his mouth. Rina realized that at this moment, she has not said a word ever since she started drawing.

“Actually, I came to school to look for Tachibana-san’s painting. Since you said that the Art teacher just sent your piece of her own accord, I thought, maybe there’s a chance it’s still in the art room…I remembered that the painting at that time was still incomplete.”

“It will never be finished.”

“Eh?”

“It was just scenery that I drew based off my memories when I was little. It’s unusual to draw scenery painting in the art room right? I just drew it from my memory, how can that kind of thing ever be completed a day?”

“…So it was like that.”

Daisuke smiled.

“However, I still really want to see it. When I saw that painting, I felt kind of nostalgic from it. It made me recall a feeling that I had forgotten at times…”

Rina stared at Daisuke’s face, and suddenly realized that he too had some frustrations in him. Even though she was unsure what Daisuke was troubled by, something definitely must have happened to cause him to let out such an expression. When she saw him a few months back showing such an expression, he probably had some troubles on his mind as well right?

“It’s just a lousy piece of art.”

“I may not know much about art, but I feel it’s not a lousy piece of art at all. Tachibana-san’s art piece could give a certain feeling to those that appreciate the work. Since you have won an award, it was probably the case right?”

“….The one who drew it never intended it to have such a meaning; how can you say those words with such confidence? Maybe, you were just feeling a wrong emotion or something.”

“I am firm on this, regardless of whether the artist or other people disagree with me, I still feel this way.”

“You sure are a happy-go-lucky kid.”

After talking up till this point, the two silently continued on with their tasks. Daisuke did not move an inch and kept his pose as a model, while Rina continued to draw his figure onto the canvas. To Rina, this was a warm experience that she had not truly experienced in a long time. Whenever she opened her mouth, she would carelessly end up arguing with Daisuke; that’s why to Rina, to be able to peacefully enjoy a time where both of them were the only ones present was a treasured moment to her.

Her pencil was the opposite of her attitude; it was honestly bringing out her emotions onto the canvas.

Although she did not know what Daisuke was thinking, but during this short one hour period, it seemed to fly faster than Rina thought. When Daisuke turned to look at the clock, Rina had also put down her pencil.

“…I’ve been thinking about this ever since the beginning.”

Daisuke spoke all of a sudden; his expression became very calm unexpectedly.

“Tachibana-san, you should stop fending for the Mushitsuki. Otherwise, even you would be suspected of being a Mushitsuki.”

Daisuke’s words were like unintentionally pouring oil onto a fire.

However, he turned away before Rina could say anything back.

“Anyway, please be careful on your way home. That’s all I wanted to say. I’ma head off first.”

Daisuke said this line as he swiftly left the art classroom, leaving behind Rina who was tightly biting her lip, while standing there motionless.

It took so much effort to have a normal conversation…but now it has all gone to waste. Not just that, Rina felt that her attitude was clearly showing that she admits herself as a Mushitsuki.

But it was just too unbearable for her. Although she finally managed to talk to Daisuke more frankly… why did Daisuke have to just blurt out such a moralistic view about Mushitsuki, which caused her to turn out like this.

Nevertheless, Daisuke’s words were somewhat expected… right now, most of

the people in this country shared the same mindset as him.

Even if it was like this, Rina still hoped that Daisuke does not look at Mushitsuki with such a mindset, and didn't want him to look at her with such view.

—I also want to experience the world that Tachibana-san sees through her eyes.

Why must he purposely choose such a time to say such things?

Her originally unwavering determination was actually shaken by just one sentence from Daisuke. She never expected to end up feeling a desire to live on again because of this.

Shifting her gaze onto the canvas, a portrait that hardly anyone would believe was done in a time span of one hour could be seen. Although the lines were a bit messy, the soft strokes of the pencil were a world apart to Rina's regular style. Even she doubted if it was she who had drawn such a portrait.

I should've never drawn this…

Just when Rina was regretting her decision, a door knock sound came from behind.

"Ex..Excuse me."

Walking into the classroom was an unexpected visitor. Rina gazed at the person in shock.

"Shiika…..?"

"Thank god; it was right to come here after all."

Shiika, who was wearing a scarf covering half of her face and a coat that she borrowed from Rina, entered the classroom.

"Shiika, why are you here? Didn't you say that you were going to meet up with your boyfriend this afternoon?"

"I just happened to pass by here, so I decided to come in for a look around. And since I got time to spare I also wanted to see how you look when you draw… and another thing…he is not my boyfriend…."

Shiika then smiled timidly.

“Since you are in the same school as — kun, I felt like checking out what kind of place this is…”

“Eh?”

“Noth-nothing!”

Rina could not help but chuckle when she saw Shiika quickly turning away. Although she never had such an experience before, this kind of feeling felt just like a sibling bringing something she has forgotten for her? Although Rina was feeling very happy, it also made her feel embarrassing at the same time.

“Though, I don’t think this place is that much fun… By the way, did you come across a boy who looked very happy? He just left here not too long ago.”

“No, I did not come across anyone…”

Upon noticing the canvas in front of Rina, Shiika’s eyes sparkled. She gave an expression like a kid who just found sweets, and stared at Rina’s face.

“This drawing was done by Rina? May I have a look?”

“Sure, though it wasn’t drawn that good…”

Just when Rina nodded her head, the doors of the art classroom suddenly slide opened.

“Eh…?!”

Shiika, who was just about to appreciate the drawing, got frightened as she looked back.

A group of different size teenagers appeared; each wearing different white animal masks.

Upon seeing Shiika who stood shocked, Rina could not help but chuckled.

“Let me introduce them, they are the members of (Mushibane). Last night I explained to you what (Mushibane) is right? Actually this is our meeting place, in many aspects; the school is a great place to confide in.”

“Lady…Who is she?” said a wolf-masked tall male in a cautious tone.

“She is my friend. For now let’s call her Yuki! Even though she is also a Mushitsuki, she still has not given her decision on whether or not she would join

us.”

Rina said as she gave Shiika, who was at a loss, a push.

“Ya know, Shiika, you are going to be late for the date! For the sake of clearing up the misunderstanding before, I think you should better get going.”

“Yea…but, that…”

Shiika looked worriedly at Rina’s face and said,

“Are you guys going to be doing something dangerous again?”

“No worries! We are only going out for a picnic. Don’t worry about it. Just enjoy your date with your boyfriend!”

“I-I already said he is not my boyfriend…”

Shiika struggled within for a bit, but still followed what Rina said and made her way to the entrance. Just when Shiika stopped halfway, and looked back as if she wanted to say something.

“Sweetheart, please be back home before dinner!”

Rina blew a kiss, stopping Shiika from talking. Although Shiika was embarrassed, she still managed to reply with a “Mhm, I will.” before leaving.

“Are you sure it is alright? Could she be a spy from the SEPB…?”

Rina gave a cold stare at those who looked with suspicion; the originally smiling girl they saw earlier was now giving off an overwhelming presence, which caused all of them to shut their mouths.

“She is my friend.”

“I-I apologize…”

“As long as you get it, it is fine.”

Upon seeing Rina smile, her comrades heaved a sigh of relief.

“Alright, let us start the discussion! Since time is running short anyway.”

Rina looked around at the silent (Mushibane) members and said,

“Just like what I’ve informed everybody, the SEPB are starting to mobilize at last. (Mushibane)’s hideouts have been assaulted many times consistently

already; I think we have been tracked for a long time. However, this does not mean that we do not have any way to counterattack—“

Chapter 3.02: Shiika Part 5

By the time Shiika arrived at the meeting place, Daisuke was already there.

It was earlier than the time they had agreed on. Judging from Daisuke's profile, he was probably deep in thought, so he didn't even notice Shiika's arrival. Every time he revealed that kind of expression, he would give others a totally different impression. Although Daisuke was always cheerful in front of Shiika, his figure in deep thought among the crowd, was exuding a sense of loneliness.

Shiika hesitated at whether she should interrupt the current Daisuke, who was still in deep thought, worrying that he might still be mad at her. Even though she was able to talk to him normally on the phone before, if they were to meet face to face, she could not help but feeling a bit scared.

– *Resolve the misunderstanding first! I have to start somewhere, right?*

"Shiika!"

Daisuke approached without hesitation, making Shiika perplexed at what to do.

"Um… That… Sorry about yesterday, it was … …"

"Don't worry about it!"

"… Eh?"

"I'm very happy you came today. Yesterday you seemed very uneasy; I was worried … I thought that we might never see each other again…. I would feel uneasy whenever I thought about it. So the fact that you were willing to come today, made me relieved, Ah ha ha!"

Daisuke said with a sincere joyful smile.

"…"

A warm feeling filled Shiika's chest. The warmth spread within along with a mild pain, which made Shiika smile naturally. Before coming here, she had thought of many words to resolve the misunderstanding, but now, all that had

faded and disappeared from her mind.

So sorry, and thank you – Shiika knew, if she were to say those words, Daisuke would start to get over-concerned about her feelings, so she kept them to herself.

Today, I will listen to Rina's remark and be honest with myself for once! That way, I would be able to give my final goodbye to Daisuke-kun — "I also felt… very happy to see Daisuke-kun again."

Shiika said it from the bottom of her heart, which caused Daisuke to blush right on the spot. She originally thought Daisuke lowered his head was because of shyness, but he suddenly raised it and gazed at the crowd at the other side, saying: "Today there will be a big parade in front of the amusement park; I was looking forward to see it. Want to go check it out?"

"Mhm!"

Shiika nodded, and both of them started walking side by side.

Since tomorrow would Christmas Eve, the streets were filled with beautiful Christmas ornaments. Despite the glare of the sun up in the sky, the December air was still pretty cold to breathe in. Walking on the street full of splendid decorations, one could not help but getting a feeling of walking on top of the icy cold cake filled with ornaments. The Christmas music could also be heard everywhere among the crowds.

"Thinking back on it… I felt like we haven't really chatted much!"

"Really? I thought we chatted a lot on the day of the movie…"

"Ah… That day… … Um… To be honest with you, I was very nervous! Because I just met Shiika and … Beside, I rarely have the opportunity to speak with girls alone."

"Now that you mentioned it, I'm probably the same… I don't have any experience talking with the boys either."

Just at that moment, Shiika suddenly remembered… Even though it was only for a few minutes, the happy memories shared with the boy whose face was covered by the goggles. It should considered as – Talking alone with the boys,

right?

Daisuke noticed Shiika's sudden change of expression and began to develop a complex expression.

"So you already had experience … … Well I thought so, Shiika should be very popular right…"

"No, not that… Even though I chatted with him, it was only a little … … I think he probably didn't care about me that much …"

Shiika said while thinking – *Why am I trying so hard to explain this?*

"Didn't care about you? That guy must have no eyes! If I was there, I would definitely reason with him!"

If Daisuke-kun was to argue with (Kakkou)-kun, even though I felt sorry for Daisuke-kun, he would probably lose very quickly. Regardless of what, I don't think Daisuke-kun is suitable to argue with someone.

Shiika felt that Daisuke and (Kakkou) were the exact opposite of one another.

Although Daisuke was always calm, sometimes he would show a different side of him just like, yesterday or the day before; (Kakkou) on the other hand doesn't speak that much, he's an elusive one, but sometime he would inadvertently show that gentle or thoughtful side of him. Shiika felt that the two men were the exact opposite of each other, and that there would never be any intersection between them.

"In short, I absolutely wouldn't be able to get along with that guy."

Indeed, even Shiika was having difficult imagining the scene of Daisuke and (Kakkou) having a nice conversation together. She felt that Daisuke's unhappy expression was quite interesting, so she could not help but to giggle again.

"What? ... Is it that funny??"

"Ah, sor-sorry, but I just find it very funny…"

"Hmhp! Ah, there it is! The Ouka amusement park!"

Looking at the direction Daisuke's finger was pointing at; a large arch with the amusement park's name carved on top could be seen. A large crowd had

gathered near the entrance of the park, probably waiting for today's parade. There were traces of firework cast over the sky in between; leaving few smokes marks in the sky.

Shiika raised her head —

"…"

Suddenly, Shiika's whole body twitched, her knees were slowly losing the strength to stand, while her consciousness started fading.

Shiika widened her eyes.

Why… I didn't even use that much power… Ugh…!

Even though Shiika was feeling anxious, her consciousness was becoming more and more untidy and foggy, as if her mind was falling down from a sudden loss of footing; the memories of the past began to flash into her mind.

The woman who was wearing a pair of round sunglasses, the goggled peoples that came attack her one after another; (Kakkou) who was aiming at her with his gun, but couldn't pull the trigger; And the girl that she met yesterday, Rina — *No … I don't want to forget anymore… …!*

Shiika doesn't want to give up the dream that was once lost. She also doesn't want to return to the life in "That City", a life that did not pursue or think about anything; just merely being alive. She had recovered her dream, and also discovered many valuable things that were irreplaceable — "… ka! Shiika!"

Daisuke's cry echoed in Shiika's ear as she slowly regained her consciousness.

Shiika raised her head up, surprised; Daisuke had stopped her from falling over by holding onto her arms. It seemed like it was only a temporary loss of consciousness.

"Sor… … Sorry, I was just feeling a little dizzy…"

Shiika said with a smile and stood up. She noticed the people around were looking at them suspiciously.

"Feeling dizzy? ... … I don't think it's that simple, we should take a trip to the hospital just to be safe…"

“No it… it’s really fine! I think it was due to my anemia; my blood pressure gets kind of low… …”

Shiika defended desperately, since going to the hospital wouldn’t help at all. There might be a chance of her being discovered by the SEPB’s highly sophisticated intelligence network. She had to avoid that by all means.

Daisuke stared at Shiika’s face for a moment, before grabbing her hand and left the line.

“Dai … Daisuke-kun!”

“You’re really not looking so well, we should cancel today’s trip! Or at least find a place to rest first …”

“Please … …! Please no, Daisuke-kun!”

Shiika tried to resist as Daisuke turned his head around to look at her.

At the same time, Shiika noticed a small white insect flying on top of Daisuke’s head.

It was Shiika’s (Mushi) — A pure white firefly.

The firefly reddened its eyes, leisurely overlooking at Shiika as if it was waiting for her will to completely yield.

Not yet –

Shiika prayed strongly, which caused the firefly to stop its movement.

Give me more time –

Shiika prayed strongly once again, the shining red eyes of the firefly gradually dimed down bit-by-bit before it finally flew away slowly.

It was the first time Shiika challenged her (Mushi).

I have decided, since you want to eat so much, I’ll let you eat as much as you want … But — “Shiika…” Daisuke’s face was filled with confusion.

Shiika bit her lips while looking at Daisuke.

Shiika doesn’t know what would happen to her in the future, but to her, right now, this short and precious period was more important than anything else. And

because it was so precious, she wouldn't want to waste any single bit of it other than staying with Daisuke. If she didn't do it, then she probably couldn't give Daisuke a proper goodbye.

Shiika thought so.

– But, don't think that you can devour all of my dream. I will never give up hope, and will never give up my dream again!

"Please …"

Daisuke gazed at Shiika's serious expression, speechless.

"I had already decided I'll be together with Daisuke-kun today."

"… I see."

Daisuke sighed and let go of Shiika's hand. He clearly hasn't eased a bit, but still said with a tone like a parent to a child.

"But in return, no rides today. Just looking at the parade… is that fine?"

"… Mhm, Thanks."

Shiika shifted from worry to joy, while Daisuke averted her gaze shyly.

They returned to the line and waited patiently for the group to move forward.

Shiika looked discretely at Daisuke's profile … She was thinking, perhaps Daisuke was still mad at her wayward. But suddenly, Daisuke held Shiika's hand. Shiika was surprised at first, but then Daisuke stared straight at Shiika and said: "Like this, there should be no problem if you're feeling dizzy again."

"… … Okay."

Shiika nodded, while holding Daisuke's hand.

The warmth slowly heated up her freezing hands from the cold air. Daisuke's heartbeats were also flowing over through his palm. A warm sense of comfort, that had been long lost for many years, was slowly filling Shiika's empty heart.

Shiika suddenly felt an urge of wanting to ask Daisuke.

"Hey… … Daisuke-kun, what's your dream?"

Daisuke was silent for a moment before answering.

“Why do you ask?”

“Have you ever had the feeling of “This is fine”? The feeling of wanting to become someone, wanting to have something, or even hopes for the future?”

Shiika stared at Daisuke while asking. She didn’t understand why she suddenly had that urge of asking, but she just wanted to know.

Daisuke, who couldn’t withstand Shiika’s gaze any longer, after a long silence, he finally whispered softly: “I … … want to find a place where I belong.”

Without any signs of lies — a sentence that was more natural than anything was let out.

“Because I was abandoned by my parents … … So, I wanted to find a place where I belong, that is my dream.”

Shiika widened her eyes.

“That is … … Daisuke-kun’s dream … …?”

A little surprised, but – Ah, I see … So I was …

Shiika finally understood … the reason why she was greatly attracted by Daisuke, ever since the first encounter. Just like what happened four years ago, the same feeling she had when she encountered the boy named (Kakkou); the joy of meeting individuals that have the same dream.

Perhaps, the moment when Shiika encountered (Kakkou) and Daisuke, she could feel from deep down that those two teenagers are the ones with same dream as her.

It was like finding beautiful gem in a beach full of sand, and wanting to treasure them tightly. A feeling of never wanting to let go, not only did it not disappear, but it grew dramatically stronger as days add on. As long as that feeling supports her, it would be enough for her to stay here — To be able to meet Daisuke, was truly wonderful —

Whenever Shiika was by Daisuke’s side, she would feel that way.

The two of them finally arrived at the amusement park entrance. Daisuke took out an envelope that was tied with ribbons from his coat’s inner pocket, and then took out the two tickets from the envelope for the staff to see.

“I got the admission tickets from one of my friends.”

Daisuke said with a smile. Their hands that were originally holding together had to let go when Daisuke took the tickets out of the envelope.

“Oh … Is that so … I should thank him properly then.”

Shiika also smiled. After entering the amusement park, they couldn’t find any other excuse so they were unable to hold each other’s hands again.

The center of the amusement park was filled with a huge crowd.

Today was a holiday after all, from the parents with their children to the couples; everyone was smiling while enjoying the amusement park.

“Woah … …”

Shiika could not help but feeling amazed, she couldn’t remember how long it had been ever since she saw such a crowd. Even if the crowd wasn’t the source of her amazement, she would still feel amazed by the joy and excitement.

Daisuke looked back at the gate they had just passed through.

“’Wendy and his friends’ Happy Christmas Parade’ … Ah, it seems like the grand parade will be held tomorrow, so today it is like foreplay or so …”

The so-called “Wendy” is this amusement park — Ouka amusement park’s mascot character that looked like a one-side black eyed wolf, pretty scary and funny in a way. Even though the wolf always played as the “bad guy” role during the performances at the amusement park, many visitors surprisingly favored him. There were even television programs that came purposely to interview him; and most recently, there were also tourists that came to visit him from afar.

A loud and clear trumpet sound rang within the amusement park.

“Woah… So cool … …”

Puppets were playing all kinds of musical instruments while walking past Shiika, whom was gazing at them with sparkly eyes.

Wendy hit the back of a blue fox’s head and ran away.

Although the blue fox tried furiously to catch up, it got tripped over, and fell literally like a “dog eats shit”. The audience laughed at their silly acts. [TL: “Dog

eats shit”. I know dogs don’t eat shit =), but it’s just a phrase of describing how hard a person fell, pretty funny if you ask me.]

Suddenly, a loud sound came from behind the acting groups. It was the fireworks; it made almost all the puppets fall to the ground due to the sudden surprise.

“Woahaha!”

Shiika laughed as she clapped her hand happily.

“Wow, fancier than I had imagined!”

“Mhm … … Awesome!”

“I heard that tomorrow night will be even better; there will even be flower-bed parade cars!”

“Wow… … I would like to see that … …”

“Then come!”

Daisuke’s sudden remark caused Shiika turn around to look at him. He seemed to be a little nervous, but he still said it very clearly: “Come here and play again tomorrow… and then enjoy the parade, just the two of us…”

What should I do? —

A chest pain Shiika had never felt before emerged from within her heart; she could not help but grip her hands tighter together in front of her chest.

Shiika had originally planned that today would be her last meeting with Daisuke, so she was going to enjoy her time with him to the fullest, and then bid him a final goodbye.

But, that is impossible now.

The rising emotions within could no longer be suppressed.

I want to be together with Daisuke-kun —

“ … Okay …”

With watery eyes, Shiika nodded clearly.

Daisuke instantly smiled with joy.

“Then, tomorrow right here! Umm… Around 5pm, meet me at the entrance of the amusement park!”

“Mmm, okay.”

Shiika smiled, nodding her head. Her chest was filled by bursts of joy, just from thinking that this happiness she felt right now could be extend to tomorrow.

But then the next instant —

“… !”

Shiika suddenly felt goose bumps all over her body as if she had been electrocuted; unable to move at all.

Behind Daisuke’s back, an unexpected person suddenly appeared.

Although the person was different from when they met four years ago and had changed to wearing a black coat instead, Shiika would never mistake her for someone else. Because in her dreams, she had seen that person many times already.

Behind those round sunglasses, the woman smiled.

Shiika quickly ran out of the crowd and dashed towards the direction of that coated woman.

“Shiika? Where are you going … …!”

Even though Shiika heard Daisuke’s surprised voice, she didn’t stop.

Why... … Why is she here … …!

Shiika arrived at the location the woman was standing before, gazing at her surroundings.

“!”

She noticed that the coated woman was now further away, blending among the crowd. Shiika then again dashed at the woman’s direction.

“Shiika!”

Biting her lips, Shiika ignored Daisuke’s calling. *Looks like I’ll have to apologize to him again…*

But Shiika didn't want to lose her target.

The person who started everything.

The culprit that made Shiika feels sadness whenever she sees Daisuke.

– "Hey, Could you tell your dream?"

The question asked four years ago was now clearly surfacing in Shiika's mind.

"(Oogui) … …!"

Shiika must see that person again, (Oogui)—the culprit that turned her into a Mushitsuki. Then, after seeing that woman, Shiika would ask her questions that she had stored during these past four years.

Why did you have to turn me into a Mushitsuki? —

Four years ago, when Shiika was avoiding being assassinated by the SEPB, she kept pondering about that very question. Even after she revived from the Fallen state a few days ago, she was still thinking and wondering about it.

Why… … For what reason did I had to become a Mushitsuki? What are (Mushi)?

No matter what, Shiika wanted to know.

Shiika pushed away the people in her way, and kept on running. Just when she crossed a wide road, she finally found the black-coated figure among the crowd.

"Wai…"

Shiika suddenly stopped, didn't even finish her word.

No.

Even though the figure was wearing the similar black long coat, she was not (Oogui).

Several men and woman started walking leisurely toward Shiika; all of them were wearing similar black long coat and familiar mechanic goggles that covered most of their faces.

How —

Shiika's whole body was pierced by fear.

The Special Environmental Preservation Bureau, as known as, the SEPB.

The organization that have been hunting her during the past four years.

Shiika could feel, for an instant, their eyes met.

They… found me —?

Shiika turned around and ran toward the opposite direction, away from the crowd.

She ran pass the side of a Ferris wheel with flashing lights on it, then rushed into a giant plaza that had many shops, then passed by stores that were selling souvenir, then through a field of rotating coffee cups, and then finally ran across a central tunnel. Many passers on the streets turned their head around at Shiika surprised, but she didn't care.

I can't hesitate anymore…Need to hurry and get out of this amusement park … and then this city. If not, they will definitely capture me again. Then … it would be the same as four years ago …

I don't want that … …!

Shiika was shouting in her mind while running.

She remembered her figure akin to an empty shell, in that "Isolation facility" during the past four years.

Now that she finally regained the dream that she once lost, and encountered the people that are precious to her. Tachibana Rina said that Shiika was her friend, and that she would worry about Shiika's safety. Rina had already become an irreplaceable close friend to Shiika.

As for the boy named Kusuriya Daisuke…

Shiika inadvertently bit her lips.

Daisuke said it before; he would bring her to this amusement park again so they could watch the parade together. Even Shiika somewhat knew that Christmas Eve was a special day for people. In such special day; Daisuke was willing to let her to stay by his side.

Shiika absolutely does not want to forget about the precious people she had

met during the past few days.

— I don't want to forget!

Shiika didn't intend on engaging, but if she had to, she probably wouldn't lose. However, if the battle was to break out right here, it would involve too many innocent people.

Shiika's (Mushi) is very special, in many ways.

She could not completely control her (Mushi), although it was possible to issue commands to some extent, the (Mushi) would only release its full power when protecting Shiika. And if Shiika's life is in danger, the (Mushi) would disregard any of her commands and act on its own to protect her.

And one last frightening thing, whenever she takes part in battles, she would loss a portion of her dream as cost. During battle, Shiika's (Mushi) would use its' power continuously, which means that even Shiika is unsure whether or not she would able to keep herself conscious.

Furthermore, if she were to lose her consciousness this time, there is a chance she might not be able to wake up again — A sudden burst of anxiety enveloped Shiika … As the loneliness of the past began to unease her. She just hoped that there is someone that can be by her side right now — The memory of those warm touches began to emerge from the praying hands of Shiika.

"No … I can't, Daisuke-kun … …"

Shiika bit her lips, trying desperately to erase Daisuke's image from her mind.

Right now, it seemed like the SEPB's combatants were starting to gather in this amusement park, and for some unknown reason, "Oogui", one of (The Original Three), had also appeared here. [TL: The figure that Shiika saw when she was with Daisuke was indeed the original "Oogui", however Shiika lost her during her chase. The figure she found later on was not Oogui, but rather the combatants of the SEPB."]

I mustn't see Daisuke-kun anymore … Even though I didn't give a proper goodbye; this might really be the last time we meet…

Shiika thought that as the feeling of happiness and ease when they held hands

were clearly imprinted in her heart. The wound that was craved by happiness before was slowly turning into an irresistible pressure, oppressing her heart.

Just then, Shiika stopped running. Since she was escaping without thinking much, she didn't notice that she had returned to the center of the amusement park that was filled by the crowd.

" … … Daisuke-kun … …"

Shiika muttered softly.

Suddenly, someone grabbed her wrist.

"Shiika, are you okay?"

The person said that while holding tightly to Shiika's wrist. It was Kusuriya Daisuke.

Daisuke grabbed Shiika whom was dumbfounded, and started running.

"Ok, follow me, hurry."

They ran pass a performance stage that was filled by the crowds, and crossed a man-made bridge. They purposely avoided the crowd while advancing; they didn't stop until they finally arrived in front of a giant gate. A giant forest could be seen over the gate, probably one of those maze-like entertainment facilities.

"…"

Shiika subconsciously caught a glimpse of someone smiling at them from the corner of her sight.

That person was wearing a round sunglass, gazing towards them interestedly.

"Daisuke-kun … … Wait a minute … …!"

"Two adult tickets please."

Daisuke took out a thousand yen bill from somewhere and handed it to the staff. After he got the tickets, he grabbed Shiika's hand and ran pass the gate. Just when they walked across a bridge covered with moss, a huge crocodile appeared from the pond in front of them. It swung its teeth-filled jaws and said with a mechanic voice: "The brave or maybe ignorant visitors! Choose your fate wisely! Do you want the right road that was filled with light? Or the dark and

cold left road —“

Without letting it finish, Daisuke processed by walking into the left road.

Strange bird sounds could be heard over their head as they walked deeper into the dim path. Soon, they arrived at a mysterious bright open space; the light dots that floated among the unknown trees were caused by the fluorescent flashing of fireflies around the area.

Daisuke didn’t give Shiika any time to enjoy such view; he purposely walked away from the road, advancing deeper into the forest in a path covered by artificial trees.

“Dai… Daisuke-kun … …?”

“Umm … This spot should be okay, right?”

Daisuke stopped after he found a spot where he could view the forest as a whole; he turned around with a smile and let go of Shiika’s hand. Shiika stood there silently, not quite understanding what had happened.

“I don’t know what you’re trying to avoid, but no one will be coming here, so don’t worry.”

“Dai…Daisuke-kun, Why … …”

“Ah… I could not help but remembering the moment when we first met. Back then, I was forcing you to come with me just like now.”

Shiika was speechless at Daisuke’s sudden inexplicable remark.

There was no way Shiika could have forgotten. They ran away just like before, away from the station staff that was chasing after them.

Shiika was a mess when it all happened, at that time, she didn’t understand how she revived from the Fallen state or why did she wanted to talk to Daisuke. Even though it was chaotic, she was still feeling happy.

“Ah, I still haven’t told you why I was being chase by the station staff right? Right after I saw Shiika, I pressed the emergency stop button without thinking, in order to stop the train.”

Shiika was now even more speechless.

Totally did not expect that Daisuke-kun would do such thing … Maybe the boy that looked well behaved right now in front of me, is actually a very impulsive person?

Daisuke laughed as he leaned against a tree trunk, and sighed.

“I couldn’t think of any other way! I’m not good at thinking originally and I didn’t know ‘what was the best way that would allow me to meet you’. However at that time, I was sure of one thing — if I didn't do it, then I would probably never see you again… … my body probably knew that it was the last chance, so it moved on its own.”

Daisuke turned around to gaze at Shiika.

“At that instant … … when both of us noticed each other, it felt as if a switch was turned on inside my mind and by the time I regained my consciousness, I had already left the train and ran onto the platform.”

Shiika couldn’t face Daisuke’s gaze, lowering her head with silence … … At that time, she also felt the same … If Daisuke knew the truth that she was being pursued by the SEPB, how disappointed he would feel.

“Me too … … When I regained my consciousness, I had also left the train … … Because I want to see you … ….”

The instant when Shiika saw Daisuke, her emotions suddenly awakened for some unknown reason. The body that should never be awakened had revived. After that, she knew that her (Mushi) had also revived. She didn’t revive with an identity as an ordinary girl, but with the identity of Mushitsuki again, and regained her dream.

“But … but, I … …”

Shiika walked a few steps backward.

She was undoubtedly spotted by the SEPB … At the same time, for some reason, she was also noticed by (Oogui). She was unsure how much of a burden she would be to Daisuke. Shiika’s rationality was warning her that she needs to leave the boy in front of her as soon as possible.

However, the boy’s sudden sentence stopped Shiika’s movement.

“I am glad that I was able to meet you, Shiika.”

“… …!”

A warm sensation filled her eyes, then it slowly surfaced to tears … the rationality that Shiika barely maintained, was breaking apart with crisp sounds.

“From the time I talked to you in the park, I noticed that you were afraid of something …”

Daisuke bit his lips.

“You don’t have to worry if I mind or not, because even so, I would still want to see you. However, I don’t know what is on your mind, so … Could you tell me? What exactly are you trying to avoid?”

“…!”

The impulsive of wanting to reveal everything to Daisuke was gripping Shiika’s heart tightly.

Just when she opened her mouths, she hesitated.

No… I can’t …

She definitely can’t implicate Daisuke — The boy who was in front of her into the dangerous situations that she encountered. She didn’t want Daisuke to find out she is a Mushitsuki, not wanting him to be afraid of her. But, she also didn’t want to leave his side …

The impulse of both senses colliding against each other was suffocating Shiika, almost making her collapse or perhaps loses her mind, to think that maybe death would be happier than living. Shiika didn’t want to hurt Daisuke, but also didn’t want Daisuke to hate her, but … …

I want to be —

Tears… finally fell down from the corner of Shiika’s eyes.

“I … … I … …”

She could only cry, not knowing what to do.

Similar to a lost child that had no direction to follow … unable to tell the correct path … she could only keep on crying, and crying …

Looking at Shiika who was crying, Daisuke could not help but to feel sad.

“Tell me, what … can I do?”

The boy’s voice was filled with uncovered confusion.

“I don’t know what I should do anymore. I want to help you, hoping that you can smile from the bottom of your heart. And my selfish request … I want to stay by your side. But I know, if I stay around you, I will hurt you. I’m lost … I… I don’t know whether I should stay by your side or not, even going as far as forcing you right now … … but I just … …”

Daisuke said softly:

“I just want to be together with you … …”

Tears kept on rolling down from Shiika’s eyes, making her unable to focus her view at the boy in front of her. It made her feel like a child that could not find her way, walking aimlessly in a never-ending road. Then finally encountered another child that was having a same situation…

Why …

A sudden question emerged from her mind.

Why was this boy so caring toward her? Why did he have the same dream as her?

His actions were similar to a boy she met four years ago. Although that boy’s action was strong-minded, and unassailable, Shiika could tell that he was lost as well.

An unprecedented chest pain was pressing against Shiika’s chest, making her bite her lips tightly. The pain was strong enough to make her faint, but she instinctively resisted.

“Daisuke-kun …”

Shiika walked closer to the boy, but didn’t touch him.

Without any warning, a sudden explosion out of nowhere blew the forest in front of them away. It completely crushed the outer walls, allowing the bright sunlight to shine through the darkness.

And then, another explosion happened, resulting gale storming at their direction. A figure then appeared in front of them, who were still covering their face against the strong winds. The figure stood in the middle of the desolate jungle, staring at the outside of the maze. Next to the figure, a ferocious creature that didn't seem like a normal insect or an animal could be seen.

The figure's face was covered by a white mask; she shook her long hair a bit.

"What … the?"

Daisuke stuck his head out from the smoke.

The white masked figure heard his voice and noticed the presence of Shiika and Daisuke. She turned her head at them, surprised. When she saw Daisuke and Shiika standing together, she became frozen like a stiff rock. Because she was wearing a mask, one couldn't tell her expression, but it must have shocked her dramatically?

As it comes to the dumbfounded point, Shiika was the same. Her mind went blank, a complete cloudy mess.

She noticed the gaze of the masked figure had slowly moved from her to Daisuke. For some reason, the time the figure spent gazing at Daisuke seemed longer.

Then the next second, a smile emerged on her face, a smile that seemed more like a self-deprecating smile that could no longer be suppressed. [TL note: From this point onward, the author started stating the figure as Rina. However, she didn't take off her mask. Only Shiika knew she was Rina.]

Shiika immediately understood the situation.

The reason why Shiika's assassins came so quickly was probably because the SEPB had arrived at this amusement park beforehand. And it seemed like they were here to engage Rina's rebel army.

Although Rina's (Mushi) tried to fly out, it got knocked back miserably into the jungle along with impact sounds. It seemed like she was fighting against a pretty large amount of enemy all at once, and obviously in a disadvantage situation.

"Mush… …"

Daisuke saw the giant ladybug that was by the teenage girl's side and shouted in panic: "Mushitsuki … …!"

The voice made both Rina and Shiika tremble.

"Shiika, let's run!"

Daisuke grabbed Shiika's arm desperately.

But, Shiika didn't move a muscle.

"Shiika! What are you doing?! We have to hurry or else …"

Daisuke seemed to be quite afraid of the monster in front of him, well, no one could blame him. Daisuke urged Shiika anxiously.

A burning pain pierced through Shiika's chest.

If Daisuke were to see Shiika's (Mushi), would he show the same reaction as now…?

Rina noticed the motionless Shiika and opened her lips …

— What are you doing? Hurry up and get out of here!

She seemed to be saying those words, however, Shiika remained motionless.

During this period, Rina's (Mushi) that was withstanding intensive gunfire-like attacks fell into a difficult situation. Whenever her (Mushi) was injured, Rina would twist her face painfully. The reason why no one was covering for her might be because she was separated from her comrades?

The giant ladybug's body was knocked back against a tree trunk, causing Rina to press against her chest tightly, while twitching her body in pain.

"Shiika!"

Daisuke pulled Shiika's hand once again.

Just then, Rina turned her head around again and moved her lips. Shiika could clearly feel the teenage girl's silent words.

— Is it okay if you can't see your boyfriend again?

Shiika's expression froze.

Yea… What Rina said was true, it would be better if I escaped right now.

A voice whispered softly from within.

Rina will be okay, she’s strong, no matter how many enemies she is fighting against, she will definitely be fine.

If Shiika doesn’t run, then Daisuke would eventually find out the truth. Just thinking about it happening, the wound within her would start to hurt again. If he knew the truth, then it would be over for both Shiika and Daisuke; they would not be able to see each other again.

— I don’t want that!

Shiika closed her eyes and ran.

Chapter 3.03: The Others

Rina entered a difficult battle with three combatants from the Special Environmental Preservation Bureau.

From the time (Mushibane) arrived to this amusement park under Rina's command, it had only been less than an hour.

And the reason why they went to Ouka Amusement Park was because of the information that came from one of their "Supporters", saying that (Fuyuhotaru) had arrived at the location.

And Rina, who received the news about (Mushibane)'s hideouts at some areas had already been ambushed a few times regularly by the SEPB, ordered her comrades at Ouka City to mobilize all at once without hesitation. No matter what, they must obtain this trump card before (Mushibane) receives a deathblow.

However, Rina's plans were overthrown completely.

The members of the SEPB had already blended into the visitors of the amusement park and were waiting to ambush Rina's group.

It was completely a trap.

By the time Rina realized this, it was already too late. They were ambushed, and Rina was quickly separated from her comrades.

"Damn it ……!"

In an artificial pond, Rina let her (Mushi) release a powerful shockwave.

The goggled people, who were stationed at the bank of the pond, commanded their (Mushi) to counter the shockwave. A (Mushi) which looked like long legged-dragonfly suddenly glowed red as it flipped upside down and struck its heads at water's surface, which immediately created a high temperature steam to rise and counterweighted the impact of the shockwave.

A giant heavily armored woodlouse curled up its body, and approached Rina by

bounce-rolling on the water's surface. Unable to move freely due to the pond, Rina could only command her ladybug to act as a shield. [TL note: The Woodlouse in this chapter could be also known as Pillbug.]

"Ugh!"

The ladybug shook uncontrollably after blocking an impact that was as strong as a truck's crush, while an intense pain burned through Rina's chest.

An eight winged flying (Mushi) descended from the sky and landed onto the back of the ladybug that was out of balance from the woodlouse's earlier impact, and began to release green fluids from its body. Soon, a strong smell filled the area as the ladybug's body gave out thick smokes.

The ladybug opened its wings, and released a shockwave that was even stronger than before, which knocked away the flying (Mushi) and the woodlouse.

However, the shockwave didn't seem like it had dealt any fatal damage to them. The three wounded (Mushi) immediately moved into formation circling Rina.

Rina clicked her tongue. With a turn, she jumped out of the freezing pond, and dashed towards the forest at full speed. She could hear the footsteps of the enemies, and the beating sounds from the wings of the (Mushi) that were chasing after her.

– If I could unleash my full strength, these guys would have been done long ago …..!

Rina cursed as she ran.

The amount of strength Rina had left within was almost close to none. For the sake of the battles ahead, she must conserve the energy she had right now.

However, inside of Rina's heart, a voice whispered.

– Is that really the case?

The reason for retreating from the battlefield right now, was it really for the sake of conserving her strength, for the sake of fighting against the Special Environmental Preservation Bureau? Was it really for the sake of saving those

Mushitsuki who had lost the place they belong?

The presences of the enemies getting closer were closing unto Rina's back.

– No

— Another voice resounded deep within Rina's heart.

There was no need for others to remind her; Rina knew it very well herself. The reason why she was running away desperately was just because of fear.

Scared — she was afraid of her own heart that was being taken over bit by bit. Inside her heart, the fear of death from (Mushi)'s complete consumption of her dream was growing deep within her.

Why don't I just give up and die? — Rina had wished for this quite a few times back already. The times when she was locked up by her father, having her dreams devoured by the (Mushi), almost fell unconscious, and when she was almost overwhelmed by indescribable loneliness — Rina had always wished for it.

Until yesterday, Rina thought that it would be all right for her to die at any time. She already had the resolution and the reason for her to give up her life.

She must find a place where the injured Mushitsuki could belong, for the sake of those that were treated unfairly by life for unknown reason just like her. For this objective, Rina did not care what she has to go through.

However, a figure of a young teenager boy appeared in Rina's mind.

Why…?

Feelings of anger rose from her chest.

— I also want to experience the world that Tachibana-san sees through her eyes.

Why did you have to say such words now? You never seriously said words like those in the past before! Even though I have been noticing you, Kusuriya…but you never even paid attention to me, right? Why must you choose such timing to say those words now?!

Even while she was running in the forest, Rina's mind was completely filled with complaints about Daisuke.

He was just like a young master who had never experienced hardship, pampered person who had never been hated by anyone.

Why are you pestering me now?!... Why did you show me that kind of expression? How can …can …you say those words… to someone like me? – It is entirely your fault that I am so afraid….

Want to live on — ever since she was born, this was the first time Rina had such thought. Although at first it was just a small thought, now it had already swelled up and filled her entire heart.

"….Ugh!"

Rina's (Mushi) was knocked away by the woodlouse, causing her to fell onto the ground due to the intense pain in her chest.

Three (Mushi) then charged at Rina who has fallen to the ground.

A distance away from Rina, the ladybug that was commanded by her managed to get up. If it was the Rina before yesterday, she would definitely get up filled with rage, but now she just couldn't do it anymore.

Within Rina's mind, which was close to giving in to fear, complaints against Daisuke were still emerging.

It is all because of you that I have become such a coward —

Unnatural monsters were lunging towards Rina while waving their claws and fangs, but in an instant, the situation took an intense change all of a sudden.

Within the darkness of the forest, came an ear-deafening roar.

"…..Ughhh!"

Rina and the goggled people all twitched their eyebrows, and covered their ears.

The one roaring was Rina's (Mushi). The ladybug, with a body akin to a giant boulder, was glowing its eyes with a dark red aura, while its entire body convulsed. It opened its gigantic wings that were the like the same size of a wall, and roared at the sky again.

Afterwards, an intense shockwave tornado spanned across the artificial forest.

“Ahhhhhhhh!”

With both such devastating and destructive power, even its host Rina was blown away. Rina crashed onto a tree on her back, resulting her unable to breathe for a moment.

The berserk behavior of the ladybug did not stop there. At first they thought that it would just continue to beat its powerful wings to generate huge tornados, but instead it bit down on the dragonfly that had its entire body overturned by the shockwave. The gigantic ladybug completely disregarded its surroundings, and opened its giant mouth. The dragonfly, unable to escape in time, immediately became the ladybug's food.

The flying (Mushi) had half of its body bitten off right on the spot, and then a goggled person in the distance, suddenly began twitching his body as if he had been electrocuted. All his comrades frantically distanced themselves away from the ladybug.

“Wha…What is happening…Why is it moving on its own…?”

With no strength left in her, Rina suddenly dropped to her knees. She could feel both her heart and her dream were all rapidly being devoured by the ladybug.

Its glowing eyes were staring at Rina.

“……!”

Rina body shrunk as she kneeled on the floor in a daze; the (Mushi) that had been obeying her commands till now, was completely acting on its own.

I am going to be devoured—just when this gut feeling surged through Rina, another intense change happened.

The ladybug‘s burning red eyes that were staring at Rina gradually dimmed down. Like a toy that just ran out of battery, its movements started to become a lot calmer.

Under the gazes of three Mushitsuki and one Fallen, the ladybug had completely returned back to its status before it went berserk. And inside of Rina’s body, the feeling of her consciousness being forcefully taken away has also

disappeared.

Wha…What on earth happened…?

Rina remained frozen, unable to understand the current situation. Nevertheless, she immediately regained her consciousness, and made a mad dash to the forest.

"……. (Nanahoshi), fol…follow me!"

The ladybug obeyed its master's command, and followed behind the escaping Rina.

The goggled people also remembered their mission, and started pursuing Rina as well. Although they encountered an unexpected situation earlier, now the situation had returned to its original state.

The (Mushi) did not listen to my command? Such thing had never happened in the past before....

Even though Rina was feeling uneasy, she could only run now. She continued to press forward, deeper into to the space the sunlight was blocked.

Rina originally thought that she could finally escape the artificial forest, but a sudden wall made up of tall trees obstructed her sight, she immediately commanded (Nanahoshi) to destroy the fences that was used for separation.

However, the woodlouse unexpectedly attacked Rina, who was trying to exit the forest, from behind. The ladybug attempted to shield Rina but both of them were knocked back into the dense forest.

"Ugh…Damn it….!"

Rina intended to return fire, but widened her eyes instead. Besides the woodlouse and the flying (Mushi), were few other (Mushi) that appeared in her sight, charging straight at her.

"N…Noooo —!"

The ladybug appeared right in front of Rina, who was frozen with fear. For the sake of protecting its paralyzed master, it spread out its wings, and released a shockwave to knock away the group of (Mushi).

Rina felt suddenly that she was really useless.

What is wrong with me…! Until yesterday, I was never this cowardly. I should have been much stronger…

Actually, Rina was very clear what the reason was.

It is all that guy's fault! All his……!

Just when Rina gritted her teeth, a scream suddenly sounded from her side.

"Wh…What the?"

What entered Rina's eye when she turned around was an unbelievable sight.

"…Eh….?"

Rina had completely forgotten the situation she was in and just froze. Because of the shock, her mind was a complete blank and was so dumbfounded that she could not even open her mouth to speak.

In front of her was a couple, they were probably enjoying the amusement park facilities? This part she could understand.

However, the problem lied between those two people.

Why are they here...?

Rina firstly looked at the girl; she recognized who the girl was. Even if it was someone that she only just met yesterday, she was a petite girl whom Rina was unbelievably familiar with. The girl's name was Anmoto Shiika.

…OK, I understand why you come here, this morning; you said you were going out on a date with your boyfriend, and looked very happy! I even felt a bit jealousy on your look.

And then slowly, Rina shifted her gaze at the boy in the front.

But you…Why are you here…?

Within Rina's stunned mind, the words from those two began to surface.

I still got some matters —

He is not my boyfriend —

Broken bits and pieces of information were beautifully pieced together in

Rina's mind.

"…..Haha….."

Rina let out a wryly laugh.

The entire situation was so funny that it was unbearable, the feeling of laughter just kept on pouring out, absolutely could not be stopped. Everything was just too funny, and it was really unbearable.

The words that Daisuke said out of interest made Rina very happy. All in all, she was happy, so happy that she was still troubled by it up till just now. But no matter how Rina was troubled by it, she was unable to find an answer, and made a decision when she was pushed to a life and death situation.

What was there to be so troubled about? These matters never had any meaning, completely no meaning at all! — Have I become weaker? No, I have not changed!

Rina forcefully gritted her teeth, to the extent of almost crushing her teeth. At the same time, a clear transparent tear streaked down from the holes of white mask.

I have not changed, whether it was the past or the present; I still do not have anything that I could treasure at all!

"Everything should…just go and die…….!"

At the same time when Rina lifted her head, the ladybug at her side had already charged into enemy's line. Without any strategy at all, it was just plain mindless attacks.

"Ugh!"

The ladybug obviously was countered, and knocked away once again. However, Rina was smiling instead; as the ladybug once again beat its massive wings.

A relentless explosion occurred and swallowed many (Mushi); those that could not resist against this kind of strength that were completely on a different level, were immediately shattered apart like rubbles.

"I will bring you all down with me…..!"

Rina seemed to have already forgotten her original objective of coming to the amusement park. Even though they were obliviously tricked, she still wanted to meet up with (Fuyuhotaru), who might be able to save the Mushitsuki. But it was all too late…the current Rina, her entire mind was filled with the intention of settling the score with her enemies right in front of her.

At that moment, the numbers of the SEPB members were already more than ten. Yet, Rina was no longer scared, nor hesitated.

She faced Shiika who didn't intend on escaping, moved her mouth, and said without a word:

Hurry up and escape!

Then she added on in her heart:

I will be fine. My dream…probably will just end right here. But it is alright, because I got nothing else to lose, so…you should escape quickly. Escape right now, and pursue your own happiness!

Rina herself found it very strange, this idea she had was very honest and truthful. Not for the sake of diverting Shiika, but she felt so from the bottom of her heart. Rina — and the same goes for Shiika, had already suffered enough. Even if one of them was able to enjoy happiness, nobody should be blamed for it.

After enduring the impacts of numerous attacks from the enemies, Rina dropped to the floor. Other than her fatigue building up in her body, her mental condition had almost reached its limit as well.

If she was to attack a few more time at full strength, she would probably be done for.

Rina looked to her side, and noticed that Shiika still didn't escape yet. She felt angry, and gave a warning message silently.

If you could no longer be with Kusuriya — could no longer see your boyfriend anymore, would it be alright?

Shiika's shoulders trembled a bit; it seemed like this line was really effective.

Rina turned around, and then after a while, she heard a voice.

"I'm sorry…!"

Rina smiled wryly.

Idiot, if you said that, wouldn't it be obvious that we actually knew each other?

But, this way, Rina would have nothing left holding her back, nothing more to be confused about, and looking closer at it, they were actually quite compatible for each other! Shiika who was a little timid and the unexpectedly strong-willed Daisuke, if it were this two, they would definitely able to get together well in the future.

A few (Mushi) flew over the ladybug's head, and dived towards Rina.

Rina looked up to stare at them, while thinking:

If I was to be taken out by them just like that, it wouldn't be that bad right? —

But at that instant, the surroundings suddenly filled with warm white lights.

"……..!"

Rina widened her eyes in disbelief; she had seen this unusual light before. But it shouldn't appear in such a place right now.

She turned her head around, and saw the scene that she was scared of.

"Idiot … …" Rina cursed.

"… Rina, I'm sorry."

The petite girl who looked good with short hair said with a smile. Near the teenage girl's side, a white colored firefly that was about the size of a meter, floated about. Pure white snowflakes seemed to glitter down around it.

This was the first time Rina saw Shiika's (Mushi).

"Firefly……"

Rina suddenly recalled the words of (MinMin); a former SEPB combat division member that recently defected and became a member of (Mushibane).

— I heard that the (Mushi) of (Fuyuhotaru) is actually a white colored firefly, which doesn't look that strong at all!

Rina realized at that instant, this teenage girl was the one who they had been

looking for ……

The group of (Mushi) that intended on attacking Rina, suddenly stopped their movement the moment when they came into contact with the white snowflakes.

“[Shatter…..]”

Shiika’s clear voice resounded throughout the space that had been enveloped by the white lights.

“[Just a bit……]”

With a sound of snap, the noise akin to something rupturing apart rang loudly against their ear. The bodies of those (Mushi) that touched those white snow-flowers began to have cracks over their bodies. (Mushi)’s deafening roar resounded throughout the space again.

“[Just a bit……]”

The teenage girl’s voice was heard throughout the tranquil forest.

As more cracks appeared on the bodies of the (Mushi), green fluids started to spurt out. The (Mushi) were struggling painfully, while their owners were also grabbing onto their chest, and curling up as if in pain. Rina could only stare dazedly at the sight in front of her, while remembering the afterword of (MinMin).

— However, no matter what, any object would be destroyed if they were to touch the snow of (Fuyuhotaru)! Such ability is a foul right?!

The white lights dispersed, as Shiika turned around and looked.

Daisuke was standing completely still in the barren forest, dumbfounded.

Shiika exposed an unexpectedly peaceful smile.

“…Goodbye.”

After saying those words, she turned her back on the young teenager.

Rina and Shiika ran away alongside each other.

“You really are a big idiot…..”

The short haired girl’s face was already covered in tears. Rina gazed at Shiika

who was running by her side and said.

“….Shiika, thank you for saving me…”

Beside Rina, Shiika continued to weep.

Chapter 4.00: The others

The closing ceremony of the second semester ended without any problems.

After the report cards were issued in the classrooms, the last dismissal bell of the second semester rang throughout the school compound.

Cries of freedom were let out by the students as the whole school was filled with the sounds of chairs being pushed away.

Rina looked at the corner of a window and got up from her chair.

The seat of an ordinary teenage boy that was always occupied seemed to be empty today. According to the homeroom teacher, he did not ask for a day off.

Rina quietly left the classroom without talking to anybody.

She took her school bag and walked along the corridors that linked to another school building. After climbing up the stairs, she walked towards the farthest room on the third floor. Written on the door's name plate, that looked much older compared to the other classrooms', were the words "Art Classroom".

Walking closer to the classroom, Rina noticed that the door was half open.

She took a peep into the classroom from the corridor; there was a teenage boy inside facing a canvas sheet.

It was Kusuriya Daisuke.

Daisuke was wearing his casual clothes, looking directly at Rina's painting. He was not looking at the portrait of himself that was drawn yesterday, but rather at the painting of scenery that was abandoned half a month ago.

It was a painting that she painted based on her memory. There was no sea, no mountains, just an ordinary drawing of a street scenery that could be seen anywhere.

When Rina was small she would draw continuously for the sake of avoiding her normally hot tempered father and crying mother. The painting was based on the sunset scene that she saw from outside the window in the room she was locked

up in.

The orange-colored street that she saw from the household filled with noises was like another world, filled with happiness in Rina's eyes. That orange-red color was so bright that it could even redden the air of the streets.

"……."

Rina sat on top of a pile of art materials in the corridor and hugged her bag, while gazing at the teenage boy inside the classroom that was staring at the painting. It was exactly the same as before, similar to the first time when she saw Daisuke.

Daisuke had not moved a muscle as he continued to admire Rina's painting. His profile was indeed completely different from the usual him.

At that time, Daisuke smiled. It was a frank smile that Rina had never seen before. Right now, she remembered, that smile was kind of similar to Shiika's smile. A smile that seemed as though the person was both enduring something painful and accepting something unreasonable, but could still smile.

What kind of expression would he give this time? — Just when Rina thought that to herself, Daisuke opened his mouth.

"Were you peeping from behind just like this last time? Tachibana-san."

Daisuke looked back while putting up his usual smile.

"……Well almost the same."

Rina stood up and walked into the art classroom.

"What are you trying to pull? You didn't even attend the closing ceremony? Today is Christmas Eve, you know! Don't have a date? Poor guy..."

As soon as Rina said those words, she began to hate herself.

I am really a despicable woman…..I clearly knew the reason why already…….

But the response from the teenage boy was unexpected.

"I do have a date actually! Which is why before the agreed meeting time, I have to kill some time."

Rina was dumbfounded before she said dazedly:

“……You kill time by looking at this painting like this?”

“Yea….”

Daisuke’s voice was rigid. Rather than saying that he was at a loss, it seemed more like he was enduring the feeling of loss within.

Rina muttered:

“That is so lame.”

Perhaps Daisuke was angry; he spoke in a rather suppressed tone.

“….Anyway, why is Tachibana-san still in school?”

“I still have things to take care of.”

“What things?”

“Important things that related to the future, I can even die for the sake of accomplishing it!”

After Rina said that in a playful tone, Daisuke sighed.

“Hmph, you are the one that is lame ….”

Rina unhappily glared at the boy.

“Why?”

“For the sake of your future, you are willing to die for it; doesn’t that mean that you are just giving up on yourself? How does that even look cool at all? That is just an idiotic attempt of self-fulfillment because you have already given up living.”

“What did you said.....”

Rina felt a strong rage building up within her, and responded in a firm tone: “How does someone like you even understand? Let me ask you, are you saying that you don’t fear death?”

“I am not afraid…because there are things that are scarier than death itself.”

Daisuke stared straight at Rina.

Rina suddenly recalled that she had heard similar lines in the past. It was the same words said by one of her hated enemy.

“Things that are scarier than death….What are they?”

“I’m not telling you.”

Daisuke firmly rejected, causing Rina to feel even unhappier.

The two of them stood still, unmoving for several minutes. Rina never expected that she would able to experience time together with Daisuke like this again. Daisuke’s gaze never left the painting in front of him. Occasionally, Rina would sneak peep at Daisuke’s profile. When Rina gazed at the teenage boy’s profile, she could feel a warm feeling awakens within her heart.

You know, Kusuriya, —

Daisuke first muttered in a soft voice before Rina could say anything, “I thought that, as long as we live, there would eventually be a solution one day…….. —“

Daisuke’s expression became a lot gentler all of a sudden; it was exactly the same as what Rina saw in the past, the same smile that made her interested in the boy in front of her.

“The moment when I saw this painting, I would recall it. As long as we still live, the day when we would fulfill our dream will eventually come. That is why I—“

Daisuke’s smile suddenly disappeared.

“But, I guess it is impossible. I don’t know anything….and even if I do know the truth; I can only stay here and hesitate… Even if I really wanted to see her again, I don’t know how of talk to her normally. If I knew it would turn out like this, then I should have never met her in the first place……”

Rina thought that Daisuke cried, but it was nothing like it. The expression he exposed was filled with pure anger. Perhaps he could not forgive himself for fearing Shiika? On the other hand, maybe he was just cursing fate for such happenings?

Rina realized that her emotions were quickly settling down. Maybe this was an obvious result of the nature of people that would cause them to distance themselves away from the existences they don’t understand. And Rina was one of those Mushitsuki that the human society came to feared from instincts.

“That’s right. Even if we live on, nothing good will come out of it….”

Rina’s murmur slowly dissolved into the silent and empty art classroom and disappeared.

That was the last conversation that she had with her fellow classmate, Kusuriya Daisuke.

Chapter 4.01: Shiika Part 6

In the art classroom that was colored by the rays of sunset, a silence laid peacefully.

Surrounded by a large number of people with white masks, Shiika lowered her head quietly.

“You said you don’t know how you recovered from that state?”

A remark of a slimmer tall man echoed loudly in the quiet school compound. Everyone that was in the art classroom was stunned by this. It seemed like Shiika’s words were too shocking for them.

Aside from Shiika, Rina was the only one among the group that didn’t wear a mask. At the corner of the art classroom, Rina was motionlessly leaning against the wall. She didn’t intend on explaining the situation to her baffled comrades and instead, she gazed dazedly at the view outside of the window, as if she was deep in thoughts.

“Lady, what’s the meaning of this? Didn’t you say that once we found (Fuyuhotaru), we would know how to awake from the state of Fallen?”

The white masked people’ gazes all gathered at Rina, who was standing at the corner.

Due to her not having any reactions ever since the meeting started, they thought that she wasn’t paying any attention toward the conversation. But that wasn’t the case. Rina sighed deeply, and said: “We may have known … … Didn’t (MinMin) and I say so? It’s your fault for having such expectation.”

Shiika had told everything she knew to Rina. From the moment when she became a Fallen by (Kakkou)’s hands four years ago, to the moment she met Daisuke and suddenly awakened from the Fallen state unknowingly a few days ago. And she also told Rina about the “Isolation Facilities” where she was living at during the past four years — After that, Rina only smiled warmly and said:

— Thank you for telling me everything.

Her voice was surprisingly calm and quiet, enough to make people feel uneasy. Shiika was very clear at that moment that Rina had made up her mind.

“But … We finally found (Fuyuhotaru)…”

“Are you trying to say that it was meaningless?”

The man was speechless after being stared by Rina’s shrilly gaze.

“Come on, you guys forgot already? We are neither terrorists nor killers! Have you all forgotten our main objective after struggling with SEPB for so long? In order to save ourselves and the other Mushitsuki, we started searching for Shiika — Searching for (Fuyuhotaru) right?! But, aren’t we also trying to save her as well? She already suffered so much from becoming a Fallen, how could we still pressure her right now? “

After the white masked people heard Rina’s firm speech, they stopped their complaining.

“I am really glad that I met you, Shiika. To be able to know more about you in the end, it made me really happy.”

Shiika imposed more force into her praying hands that were in front of her chest. Although she was happy from Rina’s confession, she could not help but feel unease when looking at Rina’s eyes. From what Shiika saw, Rina had been acting weird ever since last night; the smiles that she would occasionally show were unreal, as if she would immediately vanish.

“In the end … …?”

Shiika raised her head up.

“Rina, what do you mean by ‘in the end’?”

Rina twitched her lips a bit to show a smile. It was totally different from the ones that she always shows; a smile that was beyond the beauty of the world.

“To be able to find out the location of the isolation Facilities was lucky enough already.”

The white masked people started to riot.

“Oi, Lady, are you …”

“I’m going to Hashiba City”

Shiika immediately widened her eyes.

The male wearing a wolf mask said:

“But, Our (Mushibane)’s combatants are still scattered apart. Not to mention that all of our district leaders are currently being targeted by the ranked Mushitsuki of the SEPB … Damn! Why is this happening?!...”

“It is most likely that spectacles guy’s doing. After knowing that we have retrieved (Fuyuhotaru), he probably ordered the other divisions of SEPB to act. Even so, the time has come; any further delay will only weaken our current strength.”

“No, Rina! That place is ….!”

Shiika walked closer to Rina.

Shiika, who was staring at Rina, was particularly dazzling in Rina’s eyes.

“Actually, I had already gathered relevant information regarding the isolation facilities, known as (GARDEN), was located in Hashiba City.”

(MushiBane)’s members started to get noisy again.

“(MinMin) told me before that the city was one of the isolation facilities, but I didn’t fully trust her at that time, I feared the information would be a trap, which was why I didn’t inform you guys. However, everything is clear now.”

“But, how is that possible? The entire city is actually an isolation facility of the SEPB? …”

Hashiba City is located next to the Ouka City, a city that is in rapid development just like Ouka City. However, due to their low population, the city was gradually falling to its trend.

“Anyone went there before?”

Rina’s question silenced everyone in the room.

“… … I thought so. In order to enter that city that was surrounded by the sea and river. Aside from sea route, you have to go through at least two bridges, or take the train and walk out from the station. Since it was originally an artificial

island made to fill the gulf, it is not a necessary place to stop at if you're going anywhere. If there is no particular purpose, no one will go to Hashiba City. There are only few of one-way trains heading there every day as well. If SEPB uses their power, I think it is quite possible for them to control that place entirely."

"That city is …"

Shiika's voice was trembling.

The memories of living in that city were resurfacing. Although everyone seemed to be ordinary on the surface, there was actually not even one single human. Only those that lost their dreams, and were unable to think wandered about like ghosts. Everything in that city were human artifacts, even the people that lived in there didn't realize that they were just bunch of empty shells.

"I believed that the isolation facilities is real … no one could escape from there … … and no one ever thought about escaping from there …"

Just by remembering it, Shiika could feel a chill running down her spine. Even though nothing in particular happened during the past four years of living there, and it was mainly because that she was unable to think … Even now remembering it would make her scared.

Rina walked closer and hugged Shiika who was trembling her shoulders.

"The Fallen that was brought to that place had to "pretend" to do things every single day. Pretended to be family with other strangers … … Pretended to go to school … … Pretended working, pretended to smile, pretended to be angry … … And in a place filled with Fallen, no one would open their mouth and speak, aside from "Order", they won't listen to anything else, they couldn't even suspect themselves being alive or not… …."

Shiika grabbed Rina's arm tightly and raised her head. She then stared directly at the teenage girl who had been protecting her willingly, and continued: "Why do you have to go there… …? Please don't go… That place is ..."

Shiika shed tears as she stared at Rina, her entire mind was filled with image of Rina becoming a Fallen; an image she absolutely doesn't want to see. Even if Rina didn't become like that, Shiika knew that she had made up her mind; Rina probably intended to fight until her last breath. There was no way Shiika could

stand experiencing such a sad thing.

Just then, Rina gripped onto Shiika's slender shoulders.

"I'm going, I have decided! I'm going to use the remaining time I have left onto creating a place where Mushitsuki belong, and can live peacefully in … … That is my dream. I will not let anyone obstruct me anymore, and will no longer hesitate."

Rina smiled. Her eyes, which were looking at Shiika, emitted a shining aura.

"Ah … I am really glad I met you, Shiika. Even though there are many comrades in the past that fought by my side, there was actually none that I considered as friends … … it is just so weird! But I felt that as long as you were by my side, no matter what I do, I will be forgiven. Many things happened in the past … … There were many things that I hated as well, but just the fact that you are willing to cry for me … I'm really glad that I have lived up to now. I felt from the bottom of my heart, that being able to strive to survive was truly terrific … …"

Shiika could not help but to grab onto Rina tightly, she had completely forgotten the existences of the white masked members, trying desperately to persuade Rina: "Rina, if that is the case, then let's run away … … let's forget about everything, and escape to a place far away where there is no Mushitsuki and no SEPB …"

Rina showed a troubled smile. Just the movement alone was enough for Shiika understand Rina's response.

"Then… … I'm coming as well, I will go to Hashiba City with you, Rina … … So please don't leave me … I don't want to be left alone again … …"

Rina's expression was shaken … She lowered her head in order to hide her tearful eyes, while biting her lips as if she was enduring something.

She grabbed Shiika's shoulder, and gently pushed her away.

"… No, Shiika, you must stay here."

"…?"

"Shiika, you are not alone anymore. There is someone … … Someone out there that already noticed you. That guy…Kusuriya, I know he will definitely help you

no matter what. Even though it might be very painful for you, but I felt that, you should see him again to confirm his stance.”

Shiika widened her eyes in surprise.

How did she know Daisuke-kun’s name —?

Rina raised her head before Shiika could ask, there was not even one a single trace of sadness on her expression.

She exposed a joyful smile that was never seen in the past.

“I will go, so you should stay here and fulfill your dream! If you could find your place of belonging, then that also means my dream is fulfilled … …”

“ … … Rina …”

Rina slowly walked away from Shiika, and stood at the center of the room.

Shiika became speechless; she could only stare at Rina’s back. Her figure that was shined by the orange rays of sunset was slowly becoming the scenery-like view that was in her painting.

“(Mushibane) from now on will be heading to Hashiba City”

Rina’s determined voice echoed the art classroom, making sharp tension arise spontaneously.

“The credibility of the information obtained from (MinMin) is still uncertain. And the key point method of reviving the Fallen is still unknown … … However, if we can find it and rescue our comrades that were trapped there, then it would be our victory. Even if we couldn’t do that, it will still be our victory if we could defeat that spectacled guy and (Kakkou). No matter what, there should be no one that could replace both of their spots in the SEPB … … as long as we can defeat them, SEPB’s combat ability will surely be halved. Then from there, each district leader of (Mushibane) should be able to take over with advantages… …”

Rina’s voice was very firm, without a hint of confusion in her tone.

“I had intended to make this my final battle; I don’t even know if I can come back safely, so I don’t want to force anyone here. But if there is anyone here that is willing to fight to protect their dream, willing to risk their lives for the future, then please come with me!”

No one among the white-masked people hesitated. They all stared at their leader, Rina, while emitting a strong aura of unshakable determination.

Rina smiled weakly under Shiika's gaze.

"This is more like it … … We were fighting our hardest for this day after all!"

Rina turned around and looked at Shiika.

"Shiika … … Please don't cry. For the sake of fulfilling our dreams, we will have to live on no matter what happens, so … …"

In the end, Rina's voice that was mixed with all the emotions she could no longer suppress became awfully unclear.

"So … … Please remember me … …"

Chapter 4.02: Daisuke Part 4

Daisuke, who was wearing a large coat, stood motionlessly in a daze.

A couple with smiles of happiness passed him by.

He looked at the bustling amusement park.

A wolf mascot that wore a red cap was running around hurriedly, while enduring attacks of bright flashlights from the tourists. But his adversary, the fox, did not seem to be popular at all. Maybe because its hands were empty, causing it to look boring? It took the balloons from the hands of a nearby staff member, and waved it about near the giant door.

Daisuke stretched out a freezing hand from his pocket, and looked down at a small box in the palm of his hand.

He opened the small box.

Inside the box, there was a red watch. The design of the watch looked quite decent, and its price was unexpectedly worth the design, causing Daisuke to be very pleased with it, and so he bought the watch. He hoped that it would good on the short haired teenage girl— Unable to endure the cold winter winds blowing, Daisuke stuffed the box into his coat once more.

He raised his head and looked at the sky.

Many dark clouds could be seen covering the sky as if it was signaling the coming of snow.

What should I do?

Too many things had happened all at the same time, causing his mind to be in a mess.

Why did things turn out this way…? No, that's not it. Everything was my fault to begin with. I'm so stupid that I never realized what's the most important to me; that's why I hurt Shiika.

Goodbye—

Daisuke couldn’t help but twitch his face as he recalled the final word that Shiika said before she left.

At that moment, he didn’t even say a word, couldn’t believe the scene in front of him…Shiika must’ve been hurt when she saw Daisuke’s expression. Shiika had clearly rejected Daisuke.

I really am an idiot!

Looking at the clock, he saw that it was pointing towards six o’clock in the afternoon. It had already been an hour since their agreed meeting time.

“Shiika……”

Daisuke surveyed the surrounding at the entrance with his remaining hope, yet he didn’t see the petite teenage girl that he had been waiting for.

Of course it’d turn out this way—



Daisuke mockingly thought to himself. Just by closing his eyes, it allowed him to recall Shiika's smile.

I really wish that Shiika could smile from the bottom of her heart….I've been trying desperately to help Shiika. But needless to say about helping her, I couldn't even call out to stop her….no, before that scene in the amusement park, I didn't even realize it: right from the start, I didn't have the right to begin with.

Even so, isn't it a bit too unfair!

His face distorted as he lowered his head, and just then.

Daisuke's cell phone rang.

"….! Shiika…!"

Daisuke immediately fished out his phone from his pocket, and called out without even confirming who the other party was. Because of his panic, the present that he wanted to give to Shiika fell on the floor. He hurriedly stuffed it back into his pocket.

But the minute he heard the other party's voice, his emotions sunk even lower.

"What, so it was you?"

Daisuke's tone took a complete change; he clicked his tongue, and threw out a line without even hiding his displeasure.

"Didn't I say before, that I have things to take care of today?"

After saying it, Daisuke went silent for a moment.

Looking at the clock, and then at the entrance, there was indeed no sign of the teenage girl. He thought about it for a while before replying, "…..No, I think I will be there……"

After giving a simple reply, he hung up.

He took a photograph out from his pocket. On the photo was the emotionless figure of Shiika, who looked like a doll. It was a photo that he had received this morning.

"……"

Daisuke silently crushed the photograph.

Then he turned around without hesitation, and left the bustling amusement park.

Chapter 5.00: The others

“[Hashiba…we have arrived at Hashiba Station. When getting off the train, please watch your step —“

Without even waiting for the announcement to finish, a strong explosion blew the platform apart in the train station.

The train doors and numerous goggled figures were blown away by the explosion, and people wearing white masks charged out into the train station.

“The defense forces positioned at the train station shouldn’t be this few! Let’s get back into formation near the ticketing entrance before advancing forward!”

Leading the pack was a teenage girl wearing a dog mask. She shook her black hair and ran across the platform.

But unexpectedly, there was still no sign of any enemies.

Not just enemies, there weren’t any signs of passengers or train staff around; it was simply an empty station.

…I got a bad feeling about this…

Although the teenage girl clicked her tongue silently, she did not stop advancing forward.

Every day, there would only be three single line trains that travel to Hashiba City. But because they were using a nationalized train line, they had to go across two ticketing gates.

Although there were quite a few ways to enter Hashiba City, according to the knowledge of the former SEPB member, (MinMin), all of these forms of transportation were closely watched, or had ways of preventing non-personnel from entering. It was the same for those taking the train service, but because they knew they had to fight their way through, a form of transportation that would get them in unscathed would be the best. (Mushibane) took the train service, because even if it was the Special Environmental Preservation Bureau, they would be unable to engage in combat in a train station filled with

bystanders.

Due to this fact, (Mushibane) successfully infiltrated Hashiba City.

But, when crossing the deserted ticketing gates, all the members realized that the situation was unusually different— The number of enemies was simply too few.

This uneasiness dissipated the moment they stepped out of the train station.

Rina stood at the front of the group and said in a dry voice.

“What…is this…?”

The companions at the rear started giving out sounds of panic.

An unusual sight of Hashiba City unfolded before their eyes.

Placed in the city was a Christmas tree that could be found anywhere during this season, and every shop in front of them was decorated very grandly. Above their heads were small lights hung about, and for a certain period, would be glowing with a red - white light together. A slight distance away in front of the western styled confectionary shop was a grand double layered Christmas cake.

Taking a look at the place, one would think that this was an ordinary city scene that can be seen anywhere.

What frightened Rina were the figures of the pedestrians on the street.

Everyone was silent and walking like they were programmed into doing it. The working class group wearing suits, students wearing their uniforms, families going out or figures of a couple strolling through the place. But there was not a single person talking. Everyone was looking forward with empty eyes, slowly moving about in the street.

The lively Christmas music that surrounded the streets along with the people walking like zombies absolutely did not mix well together. It was as unnerving as a real life man - made music box.

The people in their sights were definitely Fallen.

“……..”

Everyone in white masks including Rina, were all frozen on the spot.

Rina couldn't help but charge out of the train station and grab onto the shoulder of an upper class teenager in a suit.

"Who are…you?"

Even in such an unexpected situation, the teenager did not have any response.

"I'm asking who you are."

Even raising her voice was useless; the other party just stared blankly at Rina.

"You can't even say your own name?"

She forcefully turned the other party towards her.

Rina pushed away the teenager carelessly; the teenager did not give any unhappy expression, and just slowly got up, and once again walked in a certain direction.

Rina grit her teeth and looked towards a certain point. In front of her was a couple that looked like a mother and daughter. One of them was someone she had never encountered, a middle aged woman who was slightly fat. The other person was the girl who was turned into a Fallen by (Kakkou) in the sea coast park.

"Y….You……!"

Rina called out to the girl, but she merely returned a glance, held onto the hand that should be her "mother's" and advanced forward. [TL note: the mother here is actually not the real mother of the child but another person. The original mother had already abandoned her in chapter 2.0X the others]

Rina just stood there speechless.

"W..We'd…become like that too…?"

People in the back said it. Even if Rina didn't look back, she could clearly understand the fear of her companions.

Rina stared angrily in the direction where the girl had gone, and said in a low tone,

"Don't mess with us…….who wants to become like that……!"

"B…But…."

Listening to the weak voices of her companions, Rina couldn't help but shout at them.

"Why do you think we came to this place? Isn't it for the sake of trying our best to reduce the number of people who turn out like this? As long as the SEPB remains, the number of Mushitsuki turning into Fallen would not go down! We're not here to lose, we're here to win!"

The members of (Mushibane) were all rendered silent by Rina's overwhelming presence.

"Our past comrades are definitely somewhere in this city. Don't tell me that you guys have forgotten about them already? Forgetting the regret of not being able to save them? I will definitely never forget, I was able to live on till now because of the dreams everyone sacrificed!"

Rina lowered her tone and continued:

"I have made a promise with everyone who has turned into a Fallen, I will save them one day, and find a place where they can belong. I came to this city for the sake of fulfilling this dream. I believe everybody has the same intent right? We all have a dream that we cannot let go of at all! That isn't something that you can just give up in this place! It's because we have a dream that we cannot lose, that's why we came to this place in the first place right?"

After listening to the words of Rina, the white masked group raised their heads; they looked at each other and walked up to the front of Rina with a relieved expression.

"…. You are right, if we were to just retreat from here, all the battles we have fought in the past would have gone to waste."

"That's right, everything was for the sake of this day. Even if we become Fallen, we still have (Fuyuhotaru), as long as we have her who has awakened from her Fallen state, we still have hope."

"Right, our job is to rescue all of our comrades in this place, and try our best to reduce the number of people in the SEPB. (Fuyuhotaru) would definitely be able to think of a solution……."

Upon hearing her comrades raising the alias of Shiika numerous times, a

feeling of unease began to surge through her heart.

When Shiika explained to Rina about everything, she more or less guessed the reason behind Shiika's awakening. If her guess was right, this nearby facility was probably not the reason behind Shiika's awakening from her Fallen state.

Just then, a light clapping sound entered Rina's ears as she was deep in thought.

All of the white masked figures came back to their senses, and looked in the direction of the sound. They noticed a young adult was standing in the middle of the lifeless street.

When Rina saw the figure, a guy in a suit with the pale face of a sick person and frameless lens, her gaze sharpened immediately.

"Haji… … Keigo!"

Haji seemed to have heard Rina's mutter. He stopped clapping his hand, and pushed up his specs using his index finger, and gave a light smile.

"Members of the (Mushibane), welcome to the city-size isolation facility "East-33" area, codenamed (Garden) — Ah, I really am surprised! I thought that you guys would lose all your will to fight after seeing the scene in this city… but it seems that I underestimated the leadership ability of (Ladybird). Although I am the enemy, I must say that you really are a capable person."

"……What are you trying to pull here? Coming out in front of us alone, are you looking for a death wish?"

Upon hearing Rina's words, Haji gave a slight smile.

"Although I have been attracted by the thought of death, the answer that I will give you is "No". I just suddenly remembered that I have not talked to you properly before, so I came to this place to do so."

The young adult raised his hand, stopping Rina who was about to shout "Stop messing around!"

"Fallen, that is enough, disappear!"

When the young adult's voice rang, the people in the surrounding area all turned around immediately, and in an instant, were all hurrying towards some

place.

“Wha…What just happened…? What is wrong with them……?”

“You should already know by now, only command is able to move them. Those people, who have lost their dreams, are unable to do anything out of their own will. You can try telling them to “Go die”, and I can guarantee you that a corpse would appear in front of your eyes right away.”

Upon hearing Haji’s words, which were said with such an indifferent attitude, the expressions of the white masked figures changed.

In less than a minute, all the Fallen disappeared from the front of the train station, leaving behind only (Mushibane) and Haji.

“Compared to our other isolation facilities, this one is considered to be very different. Those living in this place, excluding the large number of Fallen, are the “Supporters” of the Special Environmental Preservation Bureau who are working on their research as well as concealing the truth from the outside world. In actual fact, experimental facilities that are searching for ways to turn Mushitsuki back into ordinary people do exist, but there haven’t been any noticeable results from them.”

Haji’s mouth moved into a light smile.

“To tell you the truth, the main motive behind this place is to monitor the people who have lost their dreams, that means studying the living habits of the Fallen. From another perspective, you guys wouldn’t be looking at the more intensive segments of the research. I’d consider that lucky... I guess? Oh… Right, regarding the Intel behind (Fuyuhotaru) awakening from her Fallen state because of the research result, that was all fake….All for the sake of luring you guys into revealing yourself. The beautiful (Ladybird), I believe that you probably would have realized it by now right?”

Rina stared at Haji who was making fun of her, and the first emotion that built up within her was not rage, but doubt.

The Fallen who have lost their dreams and forgotten everything, the (Mushi) that were the main reason behind the Mushitsuki becoming Fallen; and the Mushitsuki who were attracted by such (Mushi). Rina doubted all of these, but

these problems were always at the back of her mind in the past.

“Hey, you said…you wanted to have a nice chat with me right? Then how about giving me some answers.”

Rina stared at Haji, and poured out all the doubts that she had in her heart.

“What exactly are we? What are the (Mushi) that devour our dreams? Why are we even here….?”

In the past— from the day Rina was turned into a Mushitsuki till now, how many times had she asked herself? Being afraid of the day that the (Mushi) would devour all her dreams; afraid of the stares of normal people… Living every day in fear and endlessly troubled by these questions.

“These questions are ridiculous. Based on what I know, these are rumors that have been spread around with no evidence backing them at all. Do you still want to know despite this?”

Haji’s reply was unexpected but Rina silently nodded.

“This city is the answer to them. The people who lose their dreams have no desire, and are able to accept everything. As long as the number of Mushitsuki continues to increase, there will be more and more people losing their dreams. Do you believe that…..something would happen if this goes on? The answer is the (Garden) that you guys are looking at now. Three foolish individuals calling themselves Kings are planning to let this Garden fill the world, just like that.”

— Rina’s heart skipped a beat for a moment.

Her comrades beside her did not seem to understand the meaning behind Haji’s words, and just stared at each other emptily.

The vision in front of Rina became fuzzy, as if she was hit by something, causing her to feel dizzy.

“— Then…”

This (Mushi), who exactly gave birth to them —

Haji stopped Rina before she could complete the question, and said,

“But, these kinds of things are not important at all. Well at least to the —“

“— The man called (Kakkou), he doesn’t mind at all.”

“Eh?”

Haji changed his expression in front of Rina; his gaze behind the specs became a lot gentler all of a sudden.

“What…do you mean?”

“You should ask him for the answer yourself, I can only tell you so much. Don’t look at me like that, I’m still a government worker and must refrain from any actions that would jeopardize my own situation.”

Rina noticed that Haji’s expression had already returned to normal.

Is this guy….trying to make fun of me?

Rina gritted her teeth, and called out to her (Mushi) in her heart.

A ladybug appeared from Rina’s hair, and became bigger in an instant.

“Before I deal with (Kakkou), I’ll get rid of you first!”

The members of (Mushibane) all followed closely, and called out to their own (Mushi).

Haji laughed.

“Aha, the princess of (Mushibane) is still this heroic, that’s why it’s so easy to trick you into our trap.”

In an instant, many goggled combatants appeared from different corners of the city. Behind the signboards, the corners of high - rise buildings and rooftops, above the roofs of bus stops, Rina’s vision was quickly filled with large numbers of goggled figures.

“Hmph…just as I thought, I will deal with all of you at the same time!”

Rina gave a bold smile.

But —

“The art classroom of Ouka East high school was it? To tell you the truth, it sure is an unexpected meeting place.”

Haji’s words shook the members of (Mushibane).

“Since (Fuyuhotaru) is not among you, I guess that means she’s there?”

Stunned, Rina said in a low voice.

“….How….”

Haji narrowed his eyes delightedly.

“You do know of something called a double agent right? (MinMin) sure is resourceful! She actually intended on betraying us. But after some sweet talking from me….she let us know your meeting place. And not only that, through the information gained from the events that took place in the amusement park yesterday, I know that you have indeed met up with (Fuyuhotaru).”

Rina’s heartbeat got faster and faster, at this moment… Shiika was all alone in the art classroom —

“My original motive was to find out the method behind (Fuyuhotaru)’s awakening from the Fallen state by any means. If I were to use normal means to capture her, the incident that happened four years ago would repeat itself. That is why; I have been waiting for her to reveal a loophole… the moment when her heart is at its weakest. At that moment, you ran into my clutches, just like a moth to a flame; there was no need for me to even plan anything and the opportunity itself came into my hands.”

Suppressing his laughter, a gun appeared unknowingly in the hands of smiling Haji.

Shiika……!

As one, the goggled figures lunged upon the dumbfounded Rina.

The battle in the garden where dreams were lost, unfolded.

“Since the situation’s like this…I will just have to get rid of all of you! Everyone, charge!!”

The white masked group dispersed after hearing Rina’s order.

While the goggled combatants moved towards their appointed targets, three combatants appeared in front of Rina.

“You think three people is enough to stop me?”

Rina laughed.

Suddenly, she felt an ominous presence in the surroundings.

Those who did not have any of the combat experience that Rina possesses would probably be unable to detect it. Reflecting in the pupil of Rina's eyes was the image of Haji laughing.

Looking overhead above the shoulders of the gun wielding young adult, she noticed a black dot in the sky.

"So that's the plan… If that's how it is, then…"

Rina understood the true motive behind the enemy's intentions as her gaze changed.

The goggled members suddenly distanced themselves from (Mushibane).

For the sake of protecting her lost comrades, Rina moved her (Mushi) to the front.

In the next instant, objects flying at insane speeds flew to the head of (Mushibane); two combat helicopters with ear deafening sounds appeared in the sky.

Rina looked up towards the approaching helicopters with their guns ready, and shouted:

"Watch me turn these toys into scrap metal! (Nanahoshi)!"

The giant ladybug spread its wings.

A fully powered shockwave repelled all the bullets that were fired at their targets hiding behind (Ladybird). The combat choppers that flew past (Ladybird) went out of control and crashed into the ground behind her, releasing black smoke.

Rina, who was sacrificing her dreams without any limit, was fearless. She could even feel more strength pouring out from within her.

Rina turned, and faced the enemies in front of her once again.

"Haji Keigo! I will deal with you first!"

Ignoring the other goggled figures, Rina locked onto Haji, and released the

might of her (Mushi).

The man did not seem to have noticed the overwhelming presence from Rina but withdrew the smile on his face. He quickly took evasive action, but was unable to complete his escape in time.

A blast with the force of a missile burned everything in the plaza in front of the station.

“Huu..haa….”

This was an attack made by Rina at full force. Haji was not a Mushitsuki but just an ordinary human. Even if he was lucky, he could never escape an attack like that.

— *Unless….*

“….It’s so rare for it to be Christmas, and you’re still wearing such a long coat? How about dressing up for a change?”

A voice devoid of anxiousness rang from the side.

Regardless of friend of foe, everyone looked back stunned.

“You dare to talk about this to me? Isn’t all of this equipment down to the revolver prepared by you!?”

Rina looked at the figure of this person and exploded in fury.

“(Kakkou)!”

The teenage boy, who was wearing the same pitch black coat she was used to seeing, was standing over there shouldering Haji. His whole body had already fused with the green colored Kakkou Mushi; even his inverted hair had slightly changed in color. Numerous green scar-like markings covered the revealed areas near his mouth and neck.

“First of all, I shall thank you; the situation earlier was quite dangerous.”

“That’s why I told you not to stand on the frontlines; an un-killable cockroach standing on the frontlines is an EYESORE!”

(Kakkou) let go of Haji after cursing at him.

“The main performance cannot be watched using the recorded version and

must be seen in person! Don't you agree with me?"

Haji smiled as he pushed up his glasses and behind him, stood numerous goggled figures.

As opposed to the (Mushibane) group which only had about ten people including Rina, the numbers of the SEPB were superior. But knowing that Mushitsuki who have been pushed to the extremes would have unimaginable power, both factions were clear that with the present balance of power, it was hard to tell who would win.

"Good timing, the "me" right now is even able to take you down and as long as I eliminate you, the SEPB will be over….!"

Rina was very clear, amongst the members in the Special Environmental Preservation Bureau, nobody would be able replace the strongest Mushitsuki (Kakkou); as long as she took down the teenage boy in front of her, she could easily get rid of the weakened organization in one go. When that happens, (Mushibane) would be victorious, and that would be the time when many Mushitsuki would be able to find a place they belong—

(Kakkou) clicked his tongue in frustration.

"Even now, you're still saying such things…."

Rina was disgusted by the teenage boy's indifferent attitude. Just when she wanted to shout back, she was stopped by Haji's voice.

"(Kakkou), you do not need to go easy. We've already found their hideout, and not only that, there's also a freebie called (Fuyuhotaru)."

"You just said that….he was going easy?"

Rina originally intended on attacking in anger, but paused momentarily because of the change in (Kakkou)'s expression.

"….What did you say?"

Although the expression of the teenager couldn't be seen due to the goggles, he seemed to be just as shocked by this.

"What…do you mean by this?"

“Although, I am a bit annoyed by you who was in charge of inspecting, but the double agent (MinMin) discovered their hideout, and even got hold of an easy method that will surprise people. Now, (Kabuto) is probably heading there with another person.”

“……”

“But…you should already have known (Mushibane)’s hideout, right?”

Haji said in a sarcastic tone. Just as he changed his tone, the narrow eyes behind the spectacles immediately caught sight of the teenage boy.

“What are you guys blabbering about over there? Don’t tell me that you’ve forgotten the foe in front of you?”

Rina shouted, and commanded her ladybug to release a fan shaped tornado towards (Kakkou).

(Kakkou) and Haji along with the other goggled members all dodged at once; (Mushibane)’s members took this opportunity and attacked the members of the SEPB.

“(Kakkou), stop diverting your attention away from (Fuyuhotaru)!”

Haji said towards (Kakkou) who landed in the cement tiles far away:

“You and (Fuyuhotaru) have no way of escaping anymore! Your dreams will one day be devoured by the (Mushi). But, as long as we obtain (Fuyuhotaru), there might be a way to be saved! You…We cannot turn back anymore. Other than capturing (Fuyuhotaru) like four years ago and attaining our place of belonging, do we even have any other choice? She definitely can’t forgive you for taking away her precious dream! In the first place, you guys are only able to hurt one another!”

(Kakkou) suddenly stopped moving.

“Stop acting like a fool! Defeat (Ladybird) and capture (Fuyuhotaru), (Kakkou)!!!”

Rina thought about the incident four years ago that Shiika had told her about. When Rina found out that the person who turned Shiika into a Fallen was none other than (Kakkou), she felt her own rage becoming stronger.

But, Shiika did not hold any hatred towards (Kakkou) who was her enemy. She did not curse the other person, and simply talked about the things she experienced.

And she even smiled at one point, which made Rina feel that it was rather unbelievable.

“This is the only place where you belong. I — No, the country needs you, the dream that you hoped for only exists here!”

Haji continued shouting to (Kakkou) as he faced a member of (Mushibane).

“You’ve still got the time to look around!? (Kakkou)!”

Rina sent out a shockwave towards the teenager who was standing still.

(Kakkou) quickly raised his hand holding the gun.

With an incredibly loud cannon shot that pierced the shockwave, two forces with equally devastating destructive powers clashed and negated each other.

“Lady……What are you still doing here? Shouldn’t you be saving that person… saving (Fuyuhotaru)!?”

The words of the teenager stunned Rina, and she could hear Haji clicking his tongue in the distance.

Shiika—

Worry and unease crept up in her chest, causing Rina to bite her lip and stare hatefully towards the foe in front of her.

“I must first….take you down! As long as I defeat you, as long as you do not exist, we will be able to fulfill our dreams!”

That’s right; many comrades were turned into Fallen by the teenager in front of her. The SEPB was an organization that was built upon stepping over so many people’s dreams. To defeat this immoral organization was Rina’s destiny and dream; she couldn’t back out from this any longer.

“……You really are a big idiot.”

Rina opened her eyes wider, the ladybug responding to the intense emotions of the teenage girl, opened its wings forcefully.

“It’s not the time for you to be lecturing me!”

Rina’s hair was blown upwards by the strong gust. An intense energy flowing with the powerful shockwave was fired towards the teenager.

The teenager stood there, motionless.

The shockwave struck (Kakkou) directly.

The goggles covering the teenager’s face were destroyed and its wretched pieces were blown away.

Chapter 5.01: Shiika Part 7

Shiika was alone in the silent art classroom, gazing at a red painting.

The painting was covered by a piece of cloth, leaning against the wall at the corner of the classroom. Just by looking, one could easily tell that it was Rina's work.

On the painting, laid a scenic view of streets in the evening that could be seen almost everywhere. However, just by looking at it, a nostalgic feeling arose within Shiika.

Shiika had seen a scenario that was similar to the one in the painting before. It was around four years ago, right before she started being hunted by the SEPB, the scenery of Ouka City that was filled with happiness. However … Shiika couldn't integrate herself into the scenery at the time; she could only gaze at it from a distance —

— "I want to find a place where I belong."

Daisuke had said so before. Would he, the one who shared her dream, be able to see the scene both Shiika and Rina saw?

Gazing at the peaceful scenery of the painting in front of them, filled with happiness, but sadly, still not finding their place of belonging…. … akin to those insects that were attracted to a fire, the desire to blend into the street scene in front — Would Daisuke also feel the same?

Shiika shifted her gaze at the view outside of the window.

A scenario, very similar to the one in the painting, began to expand outwards in front of her; a very stable orange sunset slowly embraced the entire Ouka City. However, in the far distant sky, laid a layer of heavy clouds that was gradually advancing towards the city.

Is Daisuke-kun … still waiting for me at the amusement park right now … …?

— Impossible, right? I already said "Goodbye" after all…

Shiika began to recall Daisuke's expression from the last time she saw him. Perhaps he was too stunned; his widened pair of eyes seemed to say it all.

Daisuke couldn't even say a word.

As Shiika stared at the view from afar, a single tear flowed from the corner of her eye.

— *If I knew earlier this would happen … I would have kept distant…*

Ever since she'd met Daisuke, she had been crying.

It didn't matter how much Shiika wanted to see him, she couldn't … If she knew things would turn out like this, wouldn't it be better if they never met in the first place? Four years ago, when she became a Fallen, she never had such a thought; but now, due to her loneliness, Shiika felt extremely bitter.

What happened yesterday in the amusement park had made Shiika timid. Although she didn't know how, she could feel her (Mushi) slowly moving away from the territory ruled by her will. At that time, she could barely suppress her (Mushi), if something similar was to happen again, she cannot assure whether she would be able to control it or not —

As such, they must not meet; she must never see him again.

Either way, since the truth was revealed, even if she wanted see to him, Daisuke probably wouldn't want to see her, right?

Ever since Shiika met Daisuke, then Rina, till the point where she was hunted again by SEPE, and then when she bid her final farewell to Daisuke. At the same time Rina was going to fight until her last breath against the SEPB.

In the end, what has she done?

Not only did she regain her dream, she had also encountered many people that were now precious to her. Yet, when she was about to lose them all, she could only stay still, all alone.

— "I don't know what I should do anymore."

Daisuke had said it before.

I also… don't know … what I am supposed to do, I'm still confused whether I …

Overwhelmed by these thoughts, Shiika could only shed tears, one after another. During these past few days; how much had she cried? Every time she was either saved by Daisuke or encouraged by Rina. But now, even those previous people were not around anymore, the only one left behind was —

A small flying insect appeared around Shiika's neck; its whitish body gently touched the tip of Shiika's nose, and landed on a painting that was hanging on the wall. Just like Rina's scenery painting from before, the painting on the wall was also covered by a piece of cloth.

Shiika slowly shifted her gaze at the direction of the painting, as if it was being pulled by it.

"…"

She wiped her tears as she slowly approached the painting under the guidance of her (Mushi) and removed the piece of cloth covering it.

"…!"

It was a pencil drawn portrait. Perhaps it was done in haste or drawn from memory; the profile wasn't drawn very clearly. However, it was still a really amazing monochrome painting. The technique was rather new and unique compared to any other painting, but through the retina, it would imprint deeply into the viewer's memory. The corner of the painting was also imprinted with Rina's familiar signature.

But what Shiika found the most shocking was the figure on the painting. That person's expression was totally different than usual, rather serious. Even then, there was absolutely no way Shiika could mistake him for someone else — it was a person she was very familiar with.

"Daisuke-kun… …? Why … …"

"Have you fulfilled your dream yet?"

A sudden voice sounded, making Shiika turned her head around.

At the entrance of the classroom, stood a person wearing a long black coat, Shiika could tell the figure was a skinny tall woman. A pair of giant goggles on top of her head and her pitch black long hair was covering her face, making it

impossible to see her expression.

“I’m the Special Environmental Preservation Bureau inspector squad’s (Namie), I’m the one who’s been watching over you …”

“Eh? ... …”

“— Just kidding.”

The tone of the woman who just self-proclaimed to be (Namie) suddenly changed; even her voice became somewhat different.

And the moment Shiika heard that voice, a trembling feeling spread from the tip of her toes to her head.

“That… that voice…! You are… …”

“So, have you fulfilled your dream yet?”

Some sort of purple powder-like object, glittered down from the woman who was using a tender and beautiful tone. Her face, hair, and the giant goggles were slowly becoming powder-like and fading away.

“Aiya, it seems like you haven’t then! I can’t believe you are still a Mushitsuki. Not to mention I specially arranged you to meet those that had similar dreams!”

A round pair of sunglasses — was the first thing that caught Shiika’s attention.

A figure that hadn’t changed the slightest bit since their encounter four years ago.

The woman, whose hair under the shine of the sunset would even render the air into an orange color, was exuding an incredible shine. Behind the round sunglasses, her eyes were staring directly at Shiika. Her hands, that were wearing a pair red leather gloves, were forked leisurely at her waist on both sides, forming a fantastic and beautiful image.

“(Oogui)!—“

Shiika gasped, her legs could not move. It was as if they were frozen.

“It was pretty difficult for me as well, you know?! That spectacled guy named Haji was always searching for me and (Kakkou)-chan’s and Rina-chan’s intuitions were sharp as well, I couldn’t even get close.”

“What… What are you talking… about?”

Shiika sounded a hoarse voice. Even though she had thought it before, if she was to meet (Oogui) again, she would first clarify those very questions that she had in mind. But due to her confusion and fear right now, she was unable to act.

(Oogui) revealed a pleasant smile.

“Don’t be afraid, I’m just here to help you.”

“…”

Shiika overlapped her hands against her chest, and step back bit by bit while the white firefly flew about, as if it was guarding her.

“Just like what I have done before, I prepared a chance for you to fulfill your dream. Mushitsuki like you will definitely try to recall their dream even if it was lost, and continue to dream! The chance that I gave you was to let you meet — those Mushitsuki that had the same dream.”

“You… … gave me… a chance?”

(Oogui)’s eyes emitted a mysterious luster, grabbing tightly onto Shiika. Just like what her name described, her gaze alone could eat a person. Even Shiika had mistaken that … the woman in the front of her was licking her lips. [TL note: (Oogui) =（暴食), which also means gluttony or overeating. Mainly due to the fact that she was one that *mass produce* minion type of Mushi.]

“You will definitely fulfill your dream and be released from the identity of Mushitsuki … …. But don’t forget to let me enjoy that delicious dream of yours again! It’s the only hobby that I enjoyed… … and also, my only purpose!”

“Fulfill my dream… … and release from the identity of Mushitsuki… …?”

Shiika frowned. She totally did not understand what this woman, who seemed to be out of reality, was talking about from beginning to end. Shiika seemed to be charmed by the woman’s gaze, as her mind began to feel drowsier.

“It’s okay; you don’t have to understand right now. You will definitely experience it with your body one day. For yourself, the most important thing that you truly need… … you will definitely find out in the end.”

“-I… I don’t really understand what you’re trying to say.”

Shiika bit her lips, trying to maintain her consciousness.

She began to recall the memories of four years ago, and the memories of the past few days.

After experiencing so much pain, and seeing those people bear much more serious injuries. Daisuke vexed because of her; Rina had to risk her life to fight because of she being a Mushitsuki.

And the culprit that caused everything to happen was right in front of her.

"I—"

Shiika tried desperately to bluff, saying:

"I won't give you my dream anymore! Neither will I ever give anyone else… I will never give you anything anymore!"

The woman's eyes, behind the sunglass, exposed a startled look.

But her frivolous laughter quickly resounded across the art classroom.

"Ahh… that emotion is the most important thing! Because of it, your dream will only become more and more delicious…"

(Oogui)'s shiny hair swayed in the air as she slowly move away from the entrance of the art classroom.

"Then please let me see… the moment when you prove those words…"

"Wait……!"

Shiika intended to catch up with (Oogui), who was slowly fading away.

However, a sudden loud noise caused her to stop.

She looked out at the window surprised, but there was nothing there.

However, the noise continued to resound. It sounded similar to those linens when blown harshly by strong winds, making a *Whoosh…Whoosh…* sound, the volume of the noise was gradually increasing as well.

Due to it being so loud, Shiika could not grasp the source of the sound.

Shiika looked at her surroundings, before turning back to look outside the window again.

“…!”

From the outside of the window, that was empty a few seconds ago, emerged a gigantic black object.

It had many branch-like sub horns, and a small size head in contrast to its gigantic body. On its blackish body, four pairs of trunk-like feet could also be seen. Its four film-like wings were supporting its front wings, which seemed very solid, vibrating at a high-speed.

It was a gigantic Hercules beetle. But not any ordinary one, it was a giant Hercules beetle that had five horns in total. [TL note: The beetle looked somewhat like Allomyrina dichotoma Linnaeus, google it if you want. This is also the first appearance of (Kabuto)]

Covered by a body that was even larger than Rina’s ladybug, the entire art classroom went dark.

The white firefly started swelling up its body in front of Shiika, who was dumbfounded.

However, the giant Hercules beetle started flapping its gigantic wings, creating waves and waves of strong wind that punctured through the windows of the art classroom with ease.

“Ah…—!”

Shiika, whom couldn’t resist the strong wind, was blown into the hallway. The white firefly was also blown into a wall.

At the same time, the windows of the hallway were shattered from the outer side.

Many goggled figures burst into the school with their (Mushi). The sudden change in the situation froze Shiika right on the spot.

“I found — Hotaru-chan! Let’s play!”

The figure that stood in the front of those goggled people, suddenly spoke with an unusually cheerful tone.

It was a teenage girl who tied her hair on both sides, just like a bunny. Even though she was wearing the SEPB’s long coat, she didn’t put her goggles on. The

teenage girl was pretty, but the mischievous grin on her face gave off a feeling of “difficult to get along with”.

The bunny-head teenage girl stared at Shiika, and changed her expression into a smile, a smile that doesn’t seem neither angry nor happy, but rather self-desperate.

“I had to pretend to betray, and also had to pretend to be ‘Fallen’. It was just too much! But, everything had to be done for this moment to take place… I will definitely catch you, and then let Haji-san acknowledge me… …!”

Next to the teenage girl, who was speaking in a rather unusually low tone, appeared a (Mushi) that looked like a cicada. However, the cicada was injured, with one of its wings torn apart.

On the teenage girl’s side, a slender tall man that was wearing goggles began to shout in a heavy tone:

“We have to catch the host before the (Mushi) uses its ability! It is okay to injure her a bit if we have to!”

It seemed like that man and the bunny-head teenage girl are the leaders of the group.

Many goggled figures began to attack Shiika all at once.

The firefly’s entire body suddenly emitted a white aura in front Shiika, whom was motionless.

“[Don’t come near me ….]”

Shiika’s heart skipped a beat, although she didn’t speak at all, her voice was resounding very clearly throughout the hallway.

The words were voiced from the mouthpart of the white firefly — and on top of that, it was also exposing fang-like teeth that were never seen before.

The goggled figures suddenly stopped their movement at once, as if they were being suppressed by an invisible force.

Some sort of glow that looked like a white flower began to descend throughout the hallway and then the classroom. The snowflakes that fell through the ceiling emitted a light glow the moment it touched the goggled

people, and then slowly faded away.

“[Shatter…]”

Shiika’s voice resounded again.

The ground suddenly began to rumble.

Aside from the spot Shiika was standing on, the entire hallway crumbled apart after the rumble sound.

Shiika could only stand there silently and watch.

The collapsing ground one after another engulfed the goggle figures, filling the entire hallway with screams.

The tall slender man was the only one who stepped back quickly enough to avoid the snowflakes.

“Shit… …Don’t touch the snow! Those snows-flakes are—“

“As expected from a Hishu level one ranked! Or else it’s not going to be fun!”

Above came the voice of the bunny-head teenage girl, she was clutching onto the injured cicada in the midair, looking down at the classroom that was gradually being destroyed with a mocking smile.

“[Shatter … everything… apart!]”

The sound of Shiika, akin to a machine, reverberated throughout the entire hallway one more time.

All the windows on the hallway began to shatter in small explosions, the concrete floor near Shiika was also slowly deforming due to the collapse. As the goggled figures fell through the cracked floor, a loud sound began to vibrate through the surrounding air, as if the school itself was roaring.

The floor and ceiling began to move as if they were alive, and started attacking the (Mushi) herd. They pierced through (Mushi)’s giant hard carapace, or became a pair of invisible palms, crushing them apart and drag them down into the never-ending abyss.

The white firefly roared again.

Every (Mushi) that were touched by the snowflakes began to wail, one after

another and, their bodies were blown into pieces from within as if they self-destructed, and then melted away from high-temperature.

“Ahahahaha! Weak (Mushi) should just all die!”

In the classroom that staged a unilateral massacre, only the bunny-head teenage girl was smiling happily. The cicada pitched a sharp chirping sound, melting away the snows before they got any closer.

“(MinMin), what are you—!”

The bunny-head teenage girl ignored the scolding from the slender tall man, only focusing her gaze sharply at Shiika.

“Well, I guess it’s time for me to get serious. Cute little (Fuyuhotaru), for my sake, please become a Fallen again!”

“No… Stop… I don’t…”

Shiika could only shake her head desperately as she watched the tragedy unfold in front of her.

Shiika… … No, the reason why (Fuyuhotaru) was feared by everyone and further assigned with the title of Hishu level one, was because her ability was almost close to invincibility.

Substance Metamorph —

Anything, when they touched by the snowflakes produced by Shiika’s (Mushi), would not be able to keep its original shape. Within the range of snowflakes falling, Shiika had a power resulting in overwhelming and complete destruction — regardless of whether she wanted to or not.

“[Don’t come near me… Go away … …]”

The white firefly continued to copy Shiika’s voice by itself.

“[I don’t want a place to belong anymore ……]

Chapter 5.02: The Others

Rina could hardly believe her eyes.

No matter how much information she gathered, she was unable to accept the sight in front of her eyes.

— *What the hell is this?*

That was the first line that Rina thought of.

Many things had happened to Rina in the past. After becoming a Mushitsuki, finding out about the existence of the Special Environmental Preservation Bureau, forming the rebel organization (Mushibane). And then after that, she escaped death quite a number of times, while desperately protecting her own dream.

And just then, Rina encountered a teenage boy in the same class and started noticing him. Although he was just an ordinary boy with no special traits, he had a special presence that drew Rina's attention.

Afterwards, Rina encountered a girl who she could call a close friend for the first time in her life. Although that girl was usually timid and helpless at times—she was a strong person. Because of the encounter Rina had with her, she felt like she learned a lot.

That was why, when Rina found out that the two of them were dating, she sensed her heart feeling strange. If there really was a god living in this world, he must really be a totally evil person!

Even so, Rina still accepted that fact.

She accepted the reality in front of her, and her own fate. In her life that never had anything good happen to her, in the end, must probably be like that.

But, the matter that appeared before her was just too much.

Ah, god —

Rina took off her white mask and thought to herself:

You really are the lowest and worst bastard —

"……Ahaha……."

Rina couldn't help but laugh…she seemed to have a habit of laughing wryly when she was too angry or shocked.

"It was you that's been…..watching me…..?"

The teenage boy standing in front of Rina's eyes, from before up till now, should have been the teenage boy that she despised the most, (Kakkou).

But now the figure reflected into Rina's eyes, was of a completely different person.

Even though the expression he had after he fused with his green (Mushi) was quite emotionless, and that his hair was also spiking up, there was no way she would mistake him as someone else. Because she had been paying attention to him in the past few months after meeting him for the first time.

"Shouldn't you be waiting for Shiika at the amusement park right now? Kusuriya……"

The figure without his goggles, (Kakkou) — Kusuriya Daisuke, did not reply to Rina's question.

"…Who exactly are you? Are you Kusuriya Daisuke? Or (Kakkou)?"

He only maintained a calm disposition, and stared silently at Rina.

"At least … when I'm in school, it is Kusuriya Daisuke. In order to carry the mission of (Kakkou), I purposely matched the semester opening period to infiltrate the school."

Daisuke's tone was the same as (Kakkou), his voice was suppressed and low, completely unlike the usual way Daisuke talks.

Rina could clearly hear the sound of her gritting her teeth.

"Did you intend on deceiving Shiika like this? You probably knew that she was the (Fuyuhotaru), right?"

"……"

Daisuke didn't reply; it seemed that he was biting his lip.

"The reason you're getting closer to her, was it so you could turn her into a Fallen once more? It sure seems like something that a despicable person like you would think of! Or simply because you don't have enough confidence to face her directly in battle? Or were you amused at the sight of Shiika unaware of the situation and laughing happily, and wanted to ridicule her?!"

Haji, who was standing in the opposite direction of where Daisuke stood, suddenly changed his expression.

"(Kakkou), what is the meaning of this? You —"

But the words of the young adult were covered by the sound of a giant ladybug flapping its wings.

Rina's heart was filled with intense emotions that she had almost forgotten, the emotion that she had when her mother was pushed to her death — murderous intent. Rina's mind was already completely taken over by this emotion.

"I am going to annihilate you……"

The ladybug opened its wings at the same time as Rina's mutter.

"Only you, I must personally kill!"

The strongest shockwave ever was fired at Daisuke.

Daisuke swiftly raised his revolver, and pulled the trigger. A bullet with destructive power far beyond the limits of a normal revolver clashed directly with the shockwave!

But, the attack that Rina fired was more powerful, and Daisuke was sent flying along with the cement ground that was smashed into dust.

Haji led the other goggled members, and prepared to engage in combat with Rina.

"…Don't come closer!"

Stopping the young adult's actions was the Mushitsuki called (Kakkou).

The teenage boy pushed away the debris, and stood up. Even after taking the shockwave that could easily crush a vehicle into pieces twice over; the Daisuke

who had fused with his (Mushi), was still alive. Even though half of his face was covered in blood, and his foothold had gotten weaker, the teenage boy was still standing there.

“All of you get back.”

After hearing Daisuke’s words without a trace of hesitation, Haji shrugged his shoulders and commanded the goggled individuals at his side: “Okay, everybody excluding (Kakkou) will go back and deal with the (Mushibane)…I will remain here and continue to watch as a spectator, that should be fine right?”

Rina and Daisuke remained silent, not responding to the young adult’s question.

“……”

Rina could feel her vision distorting; it was probably due to her using up so much power in one go, that her mental state had worsened. But she was still staring at the enemy before her with hate, while clenching her teeth tightly.

Rina really wanted to say that she had enough already—but she still had matters to take care of.

Being kept away from his actual identity for such a long time was forgivable, but Rina could not forgive him for hurting the things that she treasured.

Daisuke deprived what little hope remained of that timid teenage girl, taking away her smile.

“It was you who took away Shiika's smile……”

The teenage boy’s shoulders shuddered for a moment.

Rina once again released a shockwave with all her might.

The teenage boy instinctively responded with a blast from his (Mushi) fused revolver, but there was simply too much difference in power. Although he was hiding behind a rock wall that was upheaved by the shockwave, it was simply not enough protection; his entire body crashed hard against the street light pole.

“It was you who took everything from Shiika!”

And everything from me —

Rina wiped away the tears she wept, and continued attacking relentlessly. Every time she fired, her heart would have a feeling of something precious within slowly falling apart.

Daisuke rushed onto the remains of the high-rise apartment, avoiding the violent vortex of the shockwave. After landing next to the ladybug, he immediately fired a close range shot. The chest of the ladybug spewed out a large amount of fluids.

But Rina did not collapse because of that, even if her body withstood the impact akin to being hit by a baton, she continued to give orders to her (Mushi). The ladybug immediately blew away the body of the teenage boy with its legs that were as hard as a metal pole.

“Why do you have to win every time? Don't the three of us have the same dream? So why are you still the strongest?!”

Rina’s cheeks were wet from the tears she brushed away, yet because her mind was in a mess from her continued attacks; she was completely unaware of that.

“Your dream, wasn’t it to find a place that you belong? Then why didn’t you find me? I was ... Actually I ….!”

“Rina, Stop it! If you continue to use your power at this rate, you’ll—“

“I don’t recall ever giving you permission to call me by my name directly!”

An intense shockwave blast struck the train station directly.

Daisuke managed to escape at a critical moment as the train station behind him was shattered into pieces.

While Rina could feel a part of her heart becoming empty, she was slowly losing her ability to think; only relying on her combat instincts to fight against the enemy in front of her.

“Why…..why did you have to be (Kakkou) ….”

At that moment, Daisuke’s expression darkened.

“Shiika is definitely the strongest amongst us.”

Rina raised her head blankly.

“But….the weakest is indeed you, (Ladybird). Even though we are all lost, we will not mistake our enemies.

Daisuke’s tone carried traces of melancholy.

“What do you mean……?”

Rina’s slowly fading consciousness came back once more.

"Wasn't it you... that deprived the Mushitsuki of their dreams? Crushing Shiika’s dreams, wasn't it none other than you?"

The ladybug let out a shockwave once more. Daisuke dodged the attack with unbelievable nimble movements.

“The enemy of us Mushitsuki, isn’t who you think they are…..! If it was the SEPB that was hindering our dreams, I would have wiped them off the face of the earth long ago! If they were the people that treated us cruelly because we were different, I would have killed them all long ago!"

"Then tell me, who is the true enemy?! Why did it become like this? Why do we have to go through all of this? Why I … …"

The memories that Rina had forgotten in her heart slowly began to resurface once more along with her tears.

From the beginning since her awful father and her kind mother died, to being turned into a Mushitsuki after a coincidental meeting with a lady and living every day in fear of losing her dreams. Even though Rina acted very lively on the outside, she didn't let anyone get close to her, nor did she become closer with anyone else; even now her only friend that she finally found was in pain, while she was also — But the teenage boy’s words caused Rina’s consciousness, that was becoming distorted, to be clear once more.

“Our true enemy, wasn’t it in front of us all along?”

Rina’s eyes widened.

The ladybug at her side grinded its fangs with a “Gari” sound.

"Shiika has been enduring it quietly all along, whether it was four years ago …

or now, it was the same. She never hated anyone … nor did she blame anyone for it. She just fought silently, trying endlessly to overcome her (Mushi). Even until the last second when I turned her into a Fallen, she still fought desperately against her (Mushi).”

Rina then recalled Shiika’s face.

— I want a place where I belong.

When Shiika said this line, her face had an expression as if she was praying. She never cursed her own fate, or even at (Kakkou), not a single complaint at all.

Shiika —

Rina once again recalled the face of her precious friend.

She then realized that she didn't have any right to protect Shiika.

Shiika was far stronger than her by many times —

"I... had already lost long ago … lost to my (Mushi)."

Rina smiled.

"But, it seems like I found out … a bit too late … …"

She was already at her limit.

Rina could feel that, the memories she had with the people she encountered in the past, along with the things she had experienced, were slowly shattering apart.

The ladybug’s eyes were glowing red as its body trembled. It seemed to have waited for this moment for a very long time.

Noticing that something was going wrong, the teenage boy's expression took a big change; he hurriedly rushed to Rina’s side.

“Rina……!”

Daisuke held up Rina’s fallen body.

While feeling the warmth coming from the teenage boy's arms, Rina began to recall her painting that she had left in the art room. Because she hated hearing the cries of her mother, she would immerse herself completely into her drawing

… the scene that she saw at that time — at that moment when she was gazing at that scene, what was her dream?

"Ahh... I finally remembered it … my true dream …"

Rina looked at the ladybug in front of her that was growing in size slowly, and murmured silently: “I just wanted…. to have a place where I could belong and enjoy happiness …”

At that instant, the giant ladybug roared at the skies.

Chapter 5.03: Daisuke Part 5

“Rina! Pull yourself together!”

Daisuke called out to Rina who was lying in his arms.

Rina gazed blankly with both eyes; there still seemed to be traces of emotion left on her expression.

It was all right, there was no doubt about it. Since Rina was the one who Daisuke had been fighting all this time, and that was why Daisuke knows, that this was certainly not the place that she would die — “It‘s… useless. Because that (Mushi) … no longer listens to me…..”

Rina said in a very thin voice, while the ladybug behind her continued to grow larger. The eyes of the ladybug were burning with the intent to rebel as it shook its body with joy, basking in glory as it achieved freedom.

The ladybug roared once again.

Strong winds blew across the surroundings, the goggled individuals along with the members of (Mushibane) who were staring in a daze at the movements of the (Mushi), were all hit by the debris.

“Damn it, it is maturing…….! Haji! Is there… Is there any way to stop this?!”

Daisuke questioned the young man who was approaching him as he shielded Rina from the flying debris.

Haji put away his revolver, and looked up at the (Mushi) that was growing.

“What’s the point of asking that now? Wasn’t it because of your half-assed actions that caused it?”

Daisuke was unable to rebut after hearing the words of the calm Haji.

“But she will die if this goes on!”

Haji replied bluntly:

“And what of it? She was originally the enemy anyway! Why should you be this

worried about her? Don't tell me you …… An inspector should always maintain his distance with the one being watched. Don't tell me, you had developed feelings that you should not be having in your profession for her?"

Haji's cold stare pierced through Daisuke, as Rina continued to stare blankly at Daisuke.

"…It's none of your business."

The young man then sighed.

"Whatever, it's fine. Now isn't the time to be pursuing these issues. In any case, there is only one way to save the life of (Ladybird), and that is to kill that (Mushi)."

Daisuke's heart skipped a beat.

Killing the (Mushi) in front of him, that means—

"That's right, the only way to save (Ladybird) is to turn her into a Fallen immediately, just like the action you took against (Fuyuhotaru). That time, for the sake of saving the life of (Fuyuhotaru) that was almost completely devoured; you killed her (Mushi), wasn't it?"

Rina widened her gradually clouding eyes, as she held onto Daisuke's hand and tightened her light grip.

Daisuke didn't notice Rina's actions; he only stared at the (Mushi) before him.

The giant ladybug had already grown larger than the destroyed station, and was still swelling up. The SEPB combatants and the remnants of the (Mushibane), were all staring silently at the sudden change of the ladybug.

Apart from killing the (Mushi), there was no other way.

Rina held tightly onto the revolver on Daisuke's hand as he was getting ready to stand up.



“Hey…Sta…Stay here…”

Hearing Rina uttering out those words, Daisuke took in a deep breath.

“It will end... really quick… Just wait a while more… Will be alright… Kusuriya…”

Rina smiled. Her black eyes had already lost their vigor, but her mouth was still showing a smile of happiness. She was no longer using the tone that she had as (Ladybird) against (Kakkou), but rather the Tachibana Rina that was talking to her fellow classmate, Kusuriya Daisuke.

Daisuke gazed at the smiling teenage girl before him and couldn't help but to mutter: “….Don’t make that face! It’s not over yet….Haven’t you always been trying to hold on? Even if you were injured during the battle with SEPB, you had never given up before! Don’t give me such an expression just because of such a small matter! If you want to smile, you should at least smile like you were when drawing me……”

“… Hey… Kusuriya…I have a request…”

Rina whispered in a soft voice, she seemed unable to hear the words that Daisuke spoke even though he was right beside her— and even though the teenage girl was looking directly at Daisuke's face, she was unable to see his face clearly.

“Save… Shiika…”

Daisuke’s face stiffened.

“…. I beg you…please become her place of belonging where she can stay….You are the only one she can rely on……”

Near Rina’s eyes that were gradually losing its luster, a tear streaked down her cheek.

Daisuke bit his lip, and recalled the last smile of Shiika that he saw.

Goodbye —

That was what Shiika had said.

“I …… ”

Rina cut Daisuke off, and whispered once more.

“I…Really am… An idiot… Even up till now…”

Rina smiled as she continued, but Daisuke was unable to make out what she was saying.

“Rina … Come on … I can’t hear what you are saying…”

Just when Daisuke replied, the giant ladybug gave out an ear splitting roar.

Chapter 5.04: The Others

“Rina…? I can’t hear what you’re saying….”

Rina felt that Daisuke’s voice was becoming very distant.

Perhaps his words were just a hallucination… Her consciousness was so taxed that she was hallucinating.

She tried to keep her heavy eyes open, and raised her head to see Daisuke’s face.

The same figure of her fellow classmate that she saw normally in the class entered her eyes; that slightly unreliable, less prominent boy in the class. It sure was hard to believe that he was actually (Kakkou), the strongest Mushitsuki that had pushed her into despair so many times.

— *Or could all of this have been a dream?*

Rina thought about all these things in a daze. That’s right, this must be a dream… No matter how she thought about it, having her first love as her hated enemy—this joke was just too much.

However, the warmth coming from a pair of strong arms was clearly embracing Rina, as if it was trying to tell her something.

But I guess this is the only part that isn’t a dream, right? — Rina held tightly onto the arms of the teenage boy…… Treating it as if it was far more important than her own life.

“Hey Kusuriya, did you know? I’ve always been looking at you…”

— Come to think of it, this all began months ago.

Having forgot to pack up after finishing her drawing, Rina returned to the arts classroom. Right in the middle of the classroom, which should have been empty, there was a teenage boy standing there silently.

It was a familiar face, one of a male classmate that she remembered being in the same class with. The two of them never had any chance to converse before.

Rina couldn’t bring herself to enter the classroom.

She had little impression of the teenage boy, only remembering about him roughly, but the presence that the teenage boy gave was different from usual. The teenage boy was staring at Rina’s drawing with a very calm expression. The expression on his face, though seemingly peaceful, looked like he was intentionally suppressing the feelings deep within him. That was something Rina had never seen before— No, she definitely had seen the same expression somewhere before.

Rina sat on top of the art materials piled up in the corridor. She couldn't simply forgo the drawing, but she couldn't just enter the classroom either.

The two of them just stayed at their spots, silent and motionless for thirty minutes.

The teenage boy looked at the drawing; Rina looked at the teenage boy.

— Just at that moment, the teenage boy changed his expression for the first time.

He smiled.

It was not because he was laughing at the art piece, nor was it because he was making fun of it.

That was just a smile of envy.

It was like the expression she had while looking at the scene in the drawing, the same smile that she had while looking the smiles of happy people on the streets.

Rina felt that something inside her awakened.

The instant she saw the teenage boy’s smile, a warm pain pierced through her chest.

Thinking back on it, from that moment forth, Rina had always been looking at the teenage boy seated in the far front of the class. She wanted to see the inner world of this inconspicuous ordinary boy, wanted to know about his thoughts, that was why she had been always watching him.

“Kusuriya had always been noticing me too…”

Even if she was the enemy, even if she was just being watched, Daisuke had always been looking at Rina. Although the two had never exchanged glances with one another, they had been looking each other nonetheless. Knowing that, Rina felt happy about it.

It seemed that Daisuke had never noticed Rina's gaze, and she had never noticed his.

If the two of them had found out that they were always looking at each other much earlier, maybe they wouldn't have hurt each other like this— But if it became so, the two of them would have to compete against each other for Shiika …

Rina smiled, and opened her mouth,

"I have finally remembered my dream……"

She preciously treasured the feeling of the warmth coming from the teenage boy's arms and thought: *Because I've met Shiika and you… for that, I feel blessed* — But… Perhaps this might be another hallucination…

Rina's flame of life had already weakened by then, to the point that it was almost extinguished.

Chapter 5.05: Daisuke Part 6

“Rina…? I can’t hear what you are saying…”

Just as Daisuke replied, the giant ladybug gave an ear splitting roar.

A giant gust that seemingly threatened to send everything flying was developing around Hashiba city.

Daisuke turned his face away to avoid the dust that was being swept upwards, and lowered his head to look at Rina in his arms.

“…Rina…?”

He called out to her.

There still was no response. For some reason, the body of the girl who had her eyes closed was becoming heavier.

Her face had a peaceful expression, as if she was asleep.

“……..!”

A mixture of emotions built up inside Daisuke’s heart in an instant. His hands were trembling, perhaps from the fact that he was putting too much strength into them.

The ladybug continued to roar with joy from being freed from the will of its master.

Along with an enormous body the size of a steel tower and tough carapace encasing it, seven blood red dots appeared on its wings as it spread them out. Positioned on its head, at the areas closer to the ground, multiple compounds eyes were glowing bright red.

Its legs no longer looked like legs, but instead looked like two large stone stems that were rooted to the ground. The houses that it stepped on were caving inwards, unable to withstand the weight from those concrete-like legs.

“It has finally… Matured?”

Haji looked at the transformed ladybug, and whispered. The smile that he normally had was now twisting painfully.

“The strongest matured (Mushi) we’ve faced before was the (Mushi) of a Kashu level six……And in order to defeat that (Mushi) that time, we had to mobilize at least five members that were ranking from level one up to level five—including you. (Kakkou), now that the Kashu level one (Mushi) has matured, can you imagine how this situation would turn out to be…..?”

Haji’s tone carried traces of fear.

But right now, Daisuke just felt very irritated by his voice.

He gently placed Rina’s body down on the ground. Even if she had lost her life, her pale face was still beautiful. Her beautiful hair was like black ripples spreading atop the rocks.

The combatants of the SEPB beside Daisuke were all under attack by the ladybug.

Meanwhile, the members of (Mushibane) stood there motionlessly, shocked from the fact that they had lost their leader. They just simply stood there, staring straight with their eyes wide open behind the cover of their lifeless mask.

A one sided massacre was unfolding in front of Daisuke.

The green (Mushi) that looked like a mayfly charged towards the ladybug’s head, intending to use its mandible to bite the ladybug, yet it ended up becoming food for the ladybug.

A snow white butterfly tried to release poisonous scale powder onto the head of the ladybug, however the powder was blown back by the shockwave, and it became covered by its own powder instead—causing its host to cry out in pain.

A beetle with its hard armored shell collided into the ladybug but ended up being smashed to bits by its foot, and without even having the chance to cry out once, it disintegrated into the thin air.

As Daisuke silently watched this sight, his consciousness distorted all of a sudden, and felt dizzy in an instant.

In his eye, the last memory he had of Rina that he just saw gradually became

blurrier.

“…….”

Daisuke looked at the Kakkou (Mushi) that had fused together with his arm down to the revolver, with its twitching antennas that were sticking out from the mouth of the gun barrel. The eyes that appeared at the root of the antennas were glowing with a pale red aura.

Daisuke forcefully tried to maintain consciousness, and stared at his own (Mushi).

— *Are my dreams that delicious? Then just go ahead and have your fill.*

While his memories and dreams were being swiftly devoured, Daisuke clearly realized one thing: The (Mushi) in front of his eyes were enemies that he could never ever forgive.

He stared hatefully at Rina’s ladybug.

— *Were Rina’s dreams that delicious? But I’ll have you return them to me, because they belonged to the girl who shared the same dreams as I do.*

Daisuke slowly took aim at the head of the ladybug.

“Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!”

Placing all his strength into the shot, he pulled the trigger.

Chapter 5.06: Shiika Part 8

Shiika was standing on top of the school premise that had already been destroyed into a pile of rubble.

Even though her tears had already dried up, Shiika, who stood still like a doll, was still repeating the words she had muttered many times already.

"Enough … Stop it …"

The school ruins shrouded in night was illuminated by a white aura once again.

"[Shatter... …. Destroy… ….]”

The pure white (Mushi) continued to forge Shiika’s voice while floating in front of her.

Silvery flower patterns began to emerge on top of its white carapace, while its thin and transparent wings remained stationary. It seemed like the (Mushi) was even capable of manipulating gravity as it floated freely among the white auras. The eyes on the sides of its head were flashing with a deep red glow.

“Go —!”

After (MinMin)’s cicada finished charging its power, it flew straight towards the white firefly like a bullet.

The white firefly suddenly emitted a brighter glow.

The cicada that was charging toward, while rotating at high speed, immediately stopped its movement in midair.

“Ugh… … Damn!”

(MinMin) clenched her teeth tightly. Even though the cicada was able to get very close to Shiika, it would get pushed back in a blink of eye.

Another pure white light flooded the entire ruined classroom.

While the firefly and cicada competed against each other, all the (Mushi) that were surrounding Shiika began to screech in pain.

A snail that carried a hard shell was crushed into pieces by a force akin to an invisible hand.

Amid the thick clouds that covered the night sky, a huge presence suddenly appeared floating in the night sky that had neither stars nor moon.

It was the (Mushi) that first attacked Shiika, a giant Hercules beetle that had the size of a battle cruiser. It flapped its three pairs of wings, trying to blow Shiika away with strong gusts.

However, the gust couldn't even get close to Shiika.

"[Stop … … Don't hurt me… …]"

Shiika's mutter, akin to a bell, rang throughout the surroundings. The strong wind was repelled back, which caused the giant Hercules beetle lose its balance in midair.

"[If I could get hurt… … then everything else should be destroyed… …]"

At the same time, strong gusts created by the white firefly began to form around Shiika. Pummeled by the cement upheaved by the strong gust, the giant Hercules beetle spilled a large amount of its body fluid as it fell outside of the school campus.

"Ughahhhhhhh!"

The tall slender man, who was wearing a huge black coat, immediately bent over while curling in pain.

At the same time, a snowflake passed through the cicada's ultrasonic wall, touching its body.

"Ah … Ahhhhh!"

As the cicada's wings began to shatter with a "snap" sound, an expression of despair suddenly emerged on (MinMin)'s face.

Other Mushitsuki had already lost the will to fight. Even though no one was escaping, no one attempted to attack Shiika as well.

However, the white firefly was still mercilessly attacking.

As if they were self-destructing, many (Mushi) began to shatter into pieces,

while goggled figures in the distance collapsed as well.

“Ahhhhhhhh!!”

(MinMin)’s cicada’s legs broke one after another, along with snapping sounds.

“Don’t —!“

(MinMin)’s lips were stained in blood. In order to suppress her own fear and pain, she had bitten her lips.

“Don't look down on me!!”

At that instant, a giant ultrasonic storm occurred.

The cicada began to rotate once more, advancing slowly toward Shiika.

“I’m not the same as those weak guys! I’m not the same as those who give up easily! I will definitely catch you, and then turn myself from Mushitsuki back to an ordinary human! I actually … Haji-san must have acted that way because of me being a Mushitsuki!... …”

The cicada, which was slowly approaching Shiika, began to emit more snapping sounds as it gradually shattered apart.

However, the cicada did not stop advancing. The friction, resulting from the two forces acting against one another, was burning the cicada with its flaming air currents.

Shiika dropped on the floor horrified.

She could only stare dazedly at (MinMin)'s eyes that were gradually losing its luster yet refused to back down.

And just then, at the spot exactly one meter in front of Shiika, the cicada stopped moving.

"… Why … …"

The cicada fell on the floor as its burning body slowly became charred.

"Why... … does it have to be you and (Kakkou)?... Aren't we the same? I also have a dream you know … … I just wanted to help the person I love..."

From the corners of (MinMin)'s eyes that were gradually losing its luster, tears

began to drop.

However, the firefly didn't stop its attack against the cicada, which was almost near its end. The firefly continued to direct invisible forces onto the dying cicada.

"…. … Haji-san... … Please save me... … I don’t want this..."

(MinMin)'s whole body tilted as she slowly kneeled down on the floor.

"[If I would get hurt, then just let everything disappear...]"

Shiika, who could not hold onto her feelings anymore, suddenly gripped onto the firefly from its back.

"Stop it! Stop depriving people of their dreams... ...!"

Even though her own dream was almost completely drained, and that even the slightest daze would make her collapse, Shiika still couldn't bear to witness the slaughter that was happening in front of her right now. She continued to cry with a voice that was barely understandable: "Yes... I admit that I actually thought about that before! I really thought that, why am I the only one that has to go through this kind of tragedy?! Everyone was afraid of me... … No one wanted to help me... … I really did think that, if I was the only one who suffered, then everyone else should just disappear... …!"

The firefly's red eyes stared directly at Shiika.

As for Shiika, she returned its gaze with her teary eyes.

"Didn't you know it as well? I had been enduring and waiting patiently. I will not let you deprive me from my precious dream anymore... I will fight until the end! Even though four years ago I had given up, but I won't give up anymore, because I have finally encountered those precious people who shared similar dreams... … I feel that the chance of fulfilling my dream has finally come... …"

As the white firefly emitted a white glow from all over its body again, many (Mushi) that were around began to issue their dying screech painfully.

"Stop it!"

Shiika squeezed her remaining strength, trying to suppress her (Mushi).

"Why are you doing this?! What do you have that allows you to do such thing?!

We're just trying our hardest to fulfill our dream, why are you obstructing us?! Please, stop depriving us from our dreams!"

No matter how sorrowfully Shiika cried, her pain couldn't reach the firefly. The firefly continued its merciless attacks onto the (Mushi) herd in front.

Even though Shiika wanted to keep on shouting, because of a sudden dizziness, she fell lifelessly onto the firefly's back.

There was nothing else she could do...

Right now, even lifting her fingers would be impossible.

Dreams were taken away, while precious people were separated; the only thing she had left was loneliness.

"Please … … Stop... …"

She murmured as if she was sleep-talking.

Sorrowful feelings similar to the ones of four years ago began to rise within Shiika, the feeling of defeat from losing against her (Mushi), the feeling of fear that she might forget everything, and also the feeling of despair that she would lose everything. She felt all that while gradually becoming sleepy from the feeling of getting lost within her mind. Suddenly, Shiika recalled (Kakkou).

What is he doing right now? Does he still remember the promise that he made to her? If possible, she would like to meet him again, and chat with him one more time.

She wanted to know what had happened to (Kakkou) during the four-year period she'd been a fallen.

Sorry, but I'm already —

The tears that she thought were used up began to wet her cheeks once more.

Feeling so sad —

Everything was just so hard to endure.

Was it such a difficult dream?

Was the dream too extravagant to ask for?

Shiika just wanted to have a place where she belongs; a place in which she could stay. Nothing more... This dream, could it only be fulfilled after suffering this much pain?

— "If you come across anything that makes you feel sad, remember to look for me!"

Memories began to flash within her mind.

—"I will be there! No matter where you are, I will always be there by your side!"

These were the words Daisuke had said.

Shiika's gradually dimming eyes, suddenly regained its luster.

Daisuke-kun—

I want to see you. I want to see you again, and then go to the amusement park one more time, haven't we promised?

Shiika collected her shattered emotions, and then clutched tightly onto the white firefly once more.

I will meet him again, and this time, I will reveal everything to him!

Even if Daisuke was be afraid of her, and further hated her because of the truth, it would be okay. Shiika will try to suppress her (Mushi) with her remaining strength and then head to the promised place … Daisuke would definitely be there waiting for her.

"[Stop... … I'm scared …]"

The white firefly said, forging the voice of Shiika.

Shiika smiled.

"Mhm, I'm afraid … … I'm so afraid that … …"

Shiika didn't know whether Daisuke would accept her or not, and also unsure if she was able to fulfill her dream or not. But at the same time, she was afraid that she would hurt Daisuke.

"But... … I'm more afraid... that I wouldn't be able to see Daisuk-kun again."

Just by thinking about being rejected, she would feel afraid.

The firefly's burning red eyes began to waver.

"So, I won't give up —"

The white brilliance that was attacking continuously, suddenly dimmed down.

However, in the next instant, Shiika felt a burning impact coming from her abdomen.

"Ah... …"

The white-colored coat Shiika was wearing was dyed red from a huge amount of blood.

She slowly turned her head around.

At the corner of the school campus, the giant Hercules beetle was moving its injured body and aiming its head at Shiika. All the sub horns on its body were gone; in contrast, many black needle-like objects appeared around Shiika's feet. And one of them was stuck in Shiika's abdomen.

Shiika's field of vision was completely distorted.

Within her mind, the image of her enjoying the parade at the amusement park with Daisuke slowly appeared.

Again, with Daisuke-kun —

Under the gaze of the white firefly, Shiika collapsed.

Chapter 5.07: Daisuke part 7

Does this count as the short afterglow before the candle flame is extinguished?

The memories of the past appeared clearly within Daisuke's heart.

He then remembered, in that cheap, narrow and quiet apartment where a cicada cry could be heard.

There was only small Daisuke sitting alone in this quiet space.

He never had a father.

His household consisted of his mother, Daisuke, and a sister who was one year older than him. His sister was born with a weak body and the fact that his mother was still willing to take care of her was a very thankful matter. Excluding the fact that Daisuke was already a Mushitsuki at that point in time, his sister surely would not be able to survive if his mother abandoned her.

Daisuke looked at the small Kakkou Mushi that landed on the floor and thought: *I must rely on myself to live on, to be strong enough to live on my own. I must rely on my own strength and find a place where I belong*— However, Daisuke's luck was very good; he was adopted by his uncle and aunt right after. At that time, his uncle had been looking for his mother who went missing after getting pregnant with his sister, but found Daisuke instead.

After picking up Daisuke, his uncle and aunt both treated Daisuke very well. Their daughter also treated him very well. But, he felt that something was wrong with this. The more happiness he felt, the stronger the guilt within Daisuke intensified.

Becoming a Mushitsuki was one of the reasons behind Daisuke's guilt. If his uncle's family were to find out about the truth, the outcome would be very obvious. But to Daisuke, the warm household was nothing more than an illusion.

Even if he was abandoned by his mother, used by the SEPB, being an "outsider" in this blessed family; Daisuke was still endlessly looking for the place where he belongs.

And it was then, Daisuke encountered (Fuyuhotaru).

The teenage girl was walking with shaky steps, moving about in the household district.

She was probably trying to escape from the goggled figures that were after her, that was why she looked so emaciated, right? Enduring the freezing winter winds; it looked like she couldn't hang on much longer.

The teenage girl was rubbing her hands in front of her slightly loose coat, and exhaled a warm breath. The scarf wrapped around her neck was thinly covered with pure white snowflakes that fell from the sky.

A small bright orb that glowed on top of the teenage girl's head was also buried within the fallen snow; it was a snow white firefly emitting light all over its body.

"It's cold …"

The teenage girl weakly smiled and looked up at the firefly.

And the next second, the teenage girl's eyes suddenly lost its light as she collapsed weakly onto the snow bed.

Not knowing how much time had passed, the doll-faced teenage girl suddenly regained her vigor.

The teenage girl then slowly got up as the snow built up around her body fell to the floor.

After that, the teenage girl stepped forward once again.

"…Why did it turn out like this…."

The teenage girl, who had especially long hair, murmured to herself: "That is because as long as we live, we will harm those around us."

Daisuke, who was concealing his face with goggles, finally spoke to the girl. He had been following her for quite a long time. He heard that the teenage girl was also a level one ranked Mushitsuki just like him, so he took precautions while handling her. But judging from the current situation, the teenage girl probably wouldn't pose a threat.

The teenage girl's face that looked back showed clear traces that she was crying earlier.

"…Who are you?"

The teenage girl let out a hoarse voice with a blank expression. He could tell with a glance that her dream was being devoured rapidly by her (Mushi).

"(Kakkou)."

The teenage girl stared at Daisuke, and seemed to understand that Daisuke was an enemy. Her face suddenly narrowed in an instant, yet she didn't seem to have any intention of running away.

"What is your dream?"

Daisuke asked the teenage girl. He knew that there was no meaning in asking this, but he was still bothered by it. This person who looked like a very frail girl, what kind of capabilities does she hold that allowed her to be assigned as a level one ranked Ishu Mushitsuki — The teenage girl in front of his eyes, in the short span of a few hours, had turned half of the SEPB's members into Fallen.

What kind of dream could she have that allow her to hold on for so long? Daisuke was dying to know it by all means.

Although the teenage girl gave a surprised expression, she immediately replied in a soft voice: "My dream is… to find a place that would allow me to stay…"

Daisuke's hand which was holding on to the revolver twitched for a second.

"Your dream is very similar to mine…"

"Really…?"

"Yeah."

Daisuke nodded in response.

Just then, the teenage girl did something that shocked Daisuke.

The teenage girl smiled happily. After looking at each other for a while, the teenage girl who seemed to have made up her mind took an unexpected action.

"Then I will give my dream to you!"

The teenage girl held out the small white firefly without hesitation.

Daisuke was dumbfounded; the girl's shocking actions caused him to become disorientated.

The teenage girl looked at the troubled Daisuke and said with a smile: "I don't have any dreams left … that is why, I'm going to give my dream to you. If one day, you are able to fulfill your dream, please remember my dream as well, okay?"

A tear streaked down from the corner of her eye.

"So, please don't ever give up on your dream!"

Looking at the teenage girl who shed clear tears, Daisuke realized one fact.

The teenage girl in front of him did not hate anyone. She didn't hate the person who turned her into a Mushitsuki, neither does she hate the enemies who pushed her into a dead end.

She was only sad because she was unable to triumph over her (Mushi), and had to give up on her dream— "I understand."

Daisuke raised his revolver and nodded his head in agreement —

"I promise you, I will never give up. So one day, you must —"

That was the story that occurred four years ago.

Daisuke has been keeping his word, holding his end of the promise. No matter what happened, no matter how big the sacrifice, he will protect his dream…

He had also slowly completed his tasks as an inspector. Meanwhile, he has been acting as an ordinary boy that could be seen anywhere and doing normal things that would not breach his cover.

But because of it, he had hurt Shiika who awakened from her Fallen state.

After that meeting a few years ago, when the two met once again, Daisuke did not realize that Shiika was (Fuyuhotaru), and never noticed that she was a Mushitsuki.

He should have found out earlier that just by being the "Kusuriya Daisuke"; a teenage boy that could be seen anywhere, staying by Shiika's side, it would push

her until she was lost. However, (Kakkou) did not have any confidence to face (Fuyuhotaru), who he had personally turned into a Fallen, so he never realized her true identity at first. And because of his fear and hesitation, he made Shiika cry.

Daisuke had no idea what he should do to compensate for the mistakes that he made.

No idea what he should do to keep the promise between Shiika and him.

And—

He had no idea what he should do to be able to meet Shiika again.

Daisuke stared at the sight before him.

Countless burning eyes were staring at him as if they were mocking him.

"— If even you can't do it, then it really is hopeless, everything is finished!"

Haji's indifferent voice came from the side.

Daisuke, who was completely drained, let go of the revolver in his hand.

The giant ladybug, which was originally Rina's (Mushi), stood unscathed. Even after it took Daisuke's strongest shot, it only trembled its body a bit. It then shook its massive body, and slowly opened up its protruding wings.

— So, please don't ever give up on your dream!

That was the promise that he made with Shiika four years ago, which he had already been forgotten in a corner of his mind.

The ladybug roared once more.

It spread outward its giant wings, and stirred up a massive tornado shockwave.

The intense shockwave with the power of a nuclear bomb exploding shook the entirety of Hashiba City.

The buildings near the bus stop, cars, and people, were all easily swept away by the blast like leaves. The entire cement road was upheaved as it shattered into debris.

Daisuke remained motionless with his consciousness blurring.

At that instant, Haji suddenly pushed Daisuke away. Daisuke with Rina in his hands rolled towards the base of a destroyed high rise building.

In the next second, an intense shockwave swept across Daisuke's side. They were blown away by the powerful winds that were as strong as a tornado, and crashed into a wall.

While in the middle of a blast that could cause anyone to lose their five senses, the battered Daisuke caught a glimpse of Haji's outline. He was struck away by the fly debris and crashed against a telephone pole, causing him to cough out a large amount of blood that stained his suit.

"Ugh... Haji …"

After the shockwave passed, Daisuke crawled towards the young adult.

But suddenly he felt a strong dizziness enveloping him.

The ladybug seemed to be mocking Daisuke as it shook its body violently. And just by doing so, it was enough to cause quakes that were more intense than earthquakes.

Daisuke's memories instantly became blurry.

The childhood memories of him being abandoned by his mother and sister, being adopted by his uncle and aunt, along with meeting Haji, meeting (Fuyuhotaru), meeting Rina, and reuniting with Anmoto Shiika.

…Hey… Can you do … me a favor…Kusuriya…

I'm sorry, Tachibana-san, I couldn't even grant your last wish…

Daisuke's consciousness was slowly becoming the Kusuriya Daisuke whom was classmates with Tachibana Rina — Alright, it's a promise then!

I'm sorry, Shiika, it looks like I'm unable to keep my promise to see the parade with you — Daisuke could feel his consciousness was becoming blurrier.

However, a loud sound that rang near his ear woke him up right away.

The revolver that he was holding tightly onto was firing nonstop as if it had gone insane.

The eyes of the Kakkou Mushi that had fused with the revolver were glowing

with a burning red aura. Its green body was starting to take over Daisuke's body at an alarming rate. Daisuke's right arm had already been completely taken over by the (Mushi).

The gun barrel of the revolver had also completely turned into the mandible of the (Mushi) as the firepower of the bullets it shot out became even scarier. The high-rise buildings began to collapse, and big holes were blown in the ground, sending large amounts of concrete flying everywhere, while the shots fired towards the sky exploded into flames on the horizon.

"Ugh…!"

The Kakkou Mushi was going berserk; the arm that was being controlled was lashing out like a whip. And Every time a shot was fired, the huge recoil would act against Daisuke's wounded body.

The ladybug seemed to have determined Daisuke to be a threat and started sending out shockwave towards him.

The immobile Daisuke had no place to escape.

Just then, the Kakkou Mushi's eyes glowed bright red, and straightened Daisuke's arm at the ladybug forcefully. Opening its big mouth, it fired a hellish bolt of fire.

A recoil that Daisuke had never experienced before shook his entire body.

The ladybug's cries rang throughout the streets that had turned into a wasteland. The cannon shot fired by the Kakkou Mushi pushed back the shockwave blast.

However, the injury inflicted from this was immediately recovered just like the reverse function in a video.

….Don't tell me that we intended on … winning against such a monster…..?

Before Daisuke could even change his expression, he was already overwhelmed by an unimaginable helplessness.

My dream….is only to this extent—

Daisuke opened his eyes slowly, and caught a glimpse of Kakkou Mushi's figure.

— The (Mushi) was laughing.

There was no mistaking it, The (Mushi) was laughing at Daisuke who had almost lost his breath and had used up all his strength. It was also looking down at Daisuke who had been unable to fulfill his dream that he had been chasing all along.

“Ha…Haha…….”

Daisuke found it very funny, and was laughing till his mouth curved.

That’s right; I’m so foolish —

He was only trying to keep his end of the promise made with the teenage girl four years ago, just clinging onto it desperately without letting go. He sacrificed many other Mushitsuki, just so he could protect his own dream.

Rina was the same.

He had never intended to talk to her.

He should have maintained his stance as an inspector, being an ordinary fellow classmate, trying to avoid having excessive contact with Rina as best as he could.

But that day, Daisuke saw the sunset scene of Rina’s painting. When he saw that painting, he could clearly feel that Rina was sharing the same dream as him, having the same feelings— And the things he’d done to Shiika was even worse. Not only did he turn Shiika into a Fallen once, he even lied to her this time.

Daisuke never noticed that Shiika was a Mushitsuki, never realized that she was (Fuyuhotaru), and had been hurting her up until the very end.

Of course he should be laughed at; at least Rina would laugh at him loudly right?

But —

“…But…”

Daisuke glared at Kakkou Mushi as the emotions that he had been suppressing until now exploded.

“I absolutely do not want to be laughed at by you, you bastard!”

Daisuke cursed as he started slamming his right hand against the wall. The

Kakkou Mushi's antennas were buried deep into the concrete and retracted tightly.

"I am indeed an idiot! A useless bastard that can't be saved! And a total wimp!"

Daisuke repeatedly slammed his right hand against a street light in his desperation to vent his anger, bending it until it snapped.

The (Mushi) was firing bullets recklessly in self-defense; causing the street to be filled with the sounds of explosions as it was being destroyed.

But Daisuke did not stop; he continued to slam his (Mushi) into the wall and floor.

"I don't have the guts to face (Fuyuhotaru) after turning her into a Fallen! I also killed Rina because of my hesitation to defeat her as an enemy! It's all because I was being a total fool!"

He swung his wrecked right arm, and shouted:

"But, I absolutely don't want to lose to you! I definitely won't give up!"

I will definitely fulfill my dream one day—

Daisuke had no courage to meet Shiika who was in (GARDEN). Even though it was for the sake of saving Shiika's life, he was still the one who turned her into a Fallen. Daisuke had always suffered from guilt for doing so.

Even after becoming a Fallen, Shiika never once gave up on her dream. Even though she had no idea what she was doing, yet in order to find a place where she belongs, she came to the Ouka City.

— I promise you, I will never give up on my dream. That is why, one day, you must — Those were the words that Daisuke had said personally four years ago.

—That is why, one day, you must also remember your dream.

Shiika kept her part of the promise; she had been desperately protecting her dream for the past four years.

Daisuke also kept his part of the promise; he had been clinging on to life, searching endlessly for the place where he belongs.

Daisuke relied on the promise he had with the teenage girl for four years to live till now. No matter how painful the experience, no matter how much pain he felt in his heart, he relied on this promise to continue fighting.

"…!"

The mouth of the gun barrel was pointing between Daisuke's eyebrows.

The burning red eyes of the Kakkou Mushi were staring directly at Daisuke. Daisuke knew it was pointing at his brain, and inside the widely stretched mouth, a bullet with an intense blaze was burning inside.

"I'm not afraid of you!"

Rina had asked Daisuke in the past.

What is scarier than (Mushi)? — Four years ago, Shiika had already told Daisuke the answer.

"To me, giving up on one's dream because of the existence of (Mushi) is even scarier."

Just then, the gaze of the Kakkou Mushi was shaken.

Daisuke still had two more promises to keep.

One was to see the parade with Shiika once more. And the other was — Daisuke had promised that whenever Shiika was upset, he would rush to her side at any time.

Daisuke recalled Rina's last words,

Kusuriya Daisuke had made up his mind, right from the start of their encounter.

He would protect Shiika.

He would make her smile from the bottom of her heart.

Who cares about Mushitsuki or whatever, it was not important at all. Not being afraid of being rejected was the determination made by a person called Kusuriya Daisuke. No matter what happens, he would protect the teenage girl that he had fallen in love with at first sight—Daisuke knew, that this was the only way for him to find the answer. That is why, to meet Shiika once again, to

confirm — Daisuke made up his mind in his heart.

“Maybe… I have found it, my — the place where I truly belong.”

The Kakkou Mushi and Daisuke exchanged stares at point blank range.

“I will never let anyone stop me again.”

Daisuke said it resolutely.

And just at that instant—

The Kakkou Mushi roared.

This was the first time that the host himself, Daisuke, had heard the green Kakkou Mushi’s roar.

It was a sound that could hardly be ignored by the listener; an unusual sound that caused the heart to be filled with sadness and endless happiness at the same time. The giant ladybug seemed to have been attracted by this sound as well and stopped in its tracks silently all of a sudden.

The cries of the (Mushi) rang throughout the city for a while, before being sucked into the night sky.

The Kakkou Mushi, which was pointing the mouth of the gun barrel at Daisuke’s brain, slowly lost its burning red glow.

It released the binding controlling Daisuke’s arm, and returned to its original combat state. A silence then embraced the destroyed ruins of the street.

The darkness that was taking away Daisuke’s consciousness had also disappeared as if it was an illusion.

“Just a while more…Join me in dreaming for a while more…(Kakkou),”

Daisuke lowered his head silently, and looked at the Kakkou Mushi that had fused to the gun, before shifting his gaze towards the giant ladybug in front of him.

The red eyes of the ladybug high above exchanged glances with Daisuke’s sharp gaze.

Just then, the ladybug beat its wings.

An intense explosion once again enveloped the entire city.

Daisuke charged forward against the sweeping gusts caused by the blasting winds.

Blocking the dust and smoke clouding his vision, he charged straight towards the giant ladybug within the intense vortex.

Dodging the front hooked claw that seemed like its front leg, he continued to run forward.

Getting past the screen that was formed by the swilling dust of the blast wind, the ladybug's head appeared in front of him immediately.

Countless red eyes seemed to be shaking in fear in an instant.

"Merry Christmas, (Nanahoshi)."

Daisuke took aim at the (Mushi)'s glowing eyes.

"Your master was truly the best person there ever was!"

After that, an immense cannon sound rang throughout the Hashiba City.



Chapter 6.00: Daisuke The Last

Dragging his heavy feet, Daisuke staggered towards Haji's side. Haji was lying on the floor with his usual grin on his face.

"I see……. So you guys have found the place where you belong….. Fulfilling your dreams…. Is the only way….to triumph over the… (Mushi)."

The amount of blood that stained the ground was appalling. The face of the young man who had lost his glasses grew paler than before…. As Daisuke had feared, his end drew near.

"I haven't fulfilled it yet. I know because the (Mushi) is still inside my body; and that's why I still have to go on searching for it."

"….From the bottom of my heart, I wish you all the best."

Haji gave a long sigh. It seemed that his breathing was becoming irregular, as he painfully tried to catch his breath. Every time he coughed, more blood would stain Daisuke's legs.

"Haji, why did you save me…?"

Daisuke lowered his head to face Haji as he asked.

Haji, only managed to open his mouth slightly, and replied: "Hey, (Kakkou) ….Although I didn't save you so that you would be indebted to me, could you promise me one thing, in return…?"

"Sure."

"I have words that I want to…..pass on to my loved one…. As for what to say, I leave it to you….."

Haji laughed sarcastically, but he began to cough again after laughing for just a moment. A trail of tears began to flow down from the corner of his eye.

"Heh…….Do you know what the dream of the girl I love is? She wants me to forget her, and pursue my own happiness, or something of that sort…….Do you think there are any other dreams harder to fulfill than that one? No matter how I

think about it, it's impossible……That's right, for as long as I live… how can I possibly leave my only sister in this world to fend for herself…? That is why—"

"I will pass on the message to her."

Daisuke said as he turned around, with his back facing Haji.

"I'm not sure how well the message will turn out to be, but I'll definitely do it, I promise you."

"…..Thanks."

Haji's voice had already become so weak that it was almost inaudible. Daisuke used the wireless transmission to send out a distress signal, so the medics should have been on their way. But could they make it in time? The chances were slim.

Daisuke actually wanted to ask Haji:

Are (Mushi) really the enemy? —

Daisuke felt that it was the (Mushi) that brought together those with the same dreams. He didn't think that the meeting between him, Shiika, and Rina was purely a coincidence.

But, it's fine.

The answer to that should be sought out only by himself.

Instead of the question, Daisuke spoke of another matter.

"Merry Christmas, Haji. I'm glad that we met."

He walked past Haji, who had an extremely peaceful expression on his face.

However, there were three figures barring the way.

Daisuke continued to walk forward without paying any heed to the obstruction.

"……Get lost, Harukiyo."

Daisuke changed his expression back to the one he had as (Kakkou).

"Don't you think you have lived for far too long already, (Kakkou)?"

The other party said in a low, steady, and heavy tone.

The voice belonged to a teenager with burning red hair, who wore what seemed to be bandages all over his face. Boasting a tall stature, he wore a thick leather coat and had his two hands stuffed in his pockets. He stood there in a commanding pose with his head held high, just like the statues of heroes of the past, and was radiating an aura that made him feel like an out-of-this-world existence.

Harykiyo — the young leader of the other Mushitsuki organization besides the SEPB and (Mushibane). Although his identity was supposedly shrouded in mystery, Daisuke had already come into contact with him more than once.

“What do you intend to do from now on, (Kakkou)?”

The young boy standing beside Harukiyo, otherwise known as Kusezaki Ume, asked him with a serious expression.

“…”

Another person that was standing beside Harukiyo was a girl about fifteen in age, who stared silently at Daisuke’s face. She had long black hair and an equally black dress, which gave a lasting impression. Although she looked very cute, her face was like that of a doll, devoid of any emotion. Daisuke seemed to recall that the girl's name was Sakaki Haruka.

“…..You guys don’t have to bother.”

Daisuke said over his shoulder as he walked past Harukiyo and gang.

But Harukiyo’s voice, seemingly filled with joy, stopped Daisuke in his tracks.

“If you plan on going to where (Fuyuhotaru) is right now, I’ll kill you on the spot. It is still far too early to be letting the two of you meet up.”

Daisuke exchange glares with Harukiyo.

“I don’t care for your schemes, I just want to settle everything I must do for now.”

“Settle everything huh?”

“I’ve got stuff I must attend to, I’ll play your games another time, so scram.”

“OK! That’s what I wanted to hear. It won’t be fun anymore if you stop playing

along.”

Daisuke brushed past Harukiyo’s shoulder as he walked by. The two never looked at each other in the eye, but their expressions were completely opposite from one another.

The red haired teenager who wore a manic smile on his face, turned to face Daisuke, who was dragging his tired and scarred body forward, and said provokingly: “I’ve become really interested in obtaining (Fuyuhotaru) for myself now. “

Daisuke stopped for a brief moment, but continued to walk on almost immediately.

“Do as you wish. She… We won’t lose to anyone ever again.”

Just then, snow began to fall from high up above on the both of them.

Chapter 6.01: Shiika The Last

Something cold fell onto Shiika's cheek, whom was lying on the ground.

… Ah, it’s snowing...

Shiika muttered nonchalantly in her mind, totally forgetting about her abdomen, which was still bleeding.

The white firefly, as if guarding the collapsed Shiika, continued to fight against the goggled people. However, it wasn’t attack mercilessly like before. Through a pair of eyes that were covered by a thin layer of mist, Shiika found the presence of the firefly that seemed a bit perplexed.

Why... Why am I still alive?... …

Shiika had been using the ability of (Mushi) ever since the beginning. Even four years ago, she had never used this much power in one go.

Numerous ice crystals fell on top of the teenage girl's body.

… … Daisuke-kun... …

Tears began to roll down Shiika's cheek once again... She felt like the time when Rina told her not to cry, was something that happened a long time ago.

Is Daisuke-kun waiting for me at the amusement park?

What is Rina doing right now?

As Shiika recalled those two within her mind, the image of another presence suddenly surfaced along with them.

It was an image of a teenage boy who wore a long black coat. And despite him being lost, he was still gazing straight at Shiika.

— Has your dream come true yet?

Shiika recalled the words (Oogui) said at their last encounter in the art classroom.

(Kakkou)-kun… … has (Kakkou)-kun fulfilled his dream yet... ...?

The teenage boy, whose face was half covered by huge goggles, was someone who had the same dream as Shiika; a Mushitsuki that was still looking for a place where he belongs.

Where is he right now? And what is he thinking about?

Does he have a girlfriend to have a date with during Christmas? If not... it wouldn't be bad if I went out with him on that day, right?

Upon thinking that, Shiika couldn’t help but giggled lightly.

… But that idea makes me feel sorry for Daisuke-kun:

The snow continued to fall from the pitch black night sky, creating a white carpet on the ground.

Shiika suddenly perceived an illusion of herself floating in the sky, staring at the ground as if the sky and ground had swapped.

Shiika relaxed her slightly livid lips.

At that instant, the firefly next to her began to shine even brighter.

As if it was trembling from joy, its body began to emanate an increasingly bright glow even whiter than snow.

What... is happening?

Shiika, whose cheeks were slightly twitching, saw a teenage boy suddenly burst into her field of vision.

The pale-faced teenage boy picked up Shiika.

— (Kakkou)-kun?

Shiika had thought that for a moment.

But it was not him. The teenage boy, under the gaze of Shiika's eyes that were gradually becoming blurry, hugged tightly onto Shiika.

Shiika felt that it was funny the moment she realized that she had mistaken him as someone else.

I... I really am a bad girl... How could I ever mistake Daisuke-kun as someone else...

While apologizing within, Shiika could feel her heart slowly being filled up by a warm feeling at the same time.

"Daisuke-kun... I really wanted to see..."

Shiika felt that... the tears on her cheeks were very warm.

Epilogue: Merry Christmas

At the moment when the morning rays shined through the window, the teenage girl slowly opened her eyes.

She was a slightly shy, and quiet girl that looked very cute with short hair.

The entire ward was filled with a clean white color. Awakened by the smell of disinfectant around her, the teenage girl blankly surveyed her surroundings.

The ward was filled with silence except for the sounds of the birds chirping outside the window.

The teenage girl looked outside the window from the bed that she was lying on. It was a sunny day and clouds were floating from the right to the left of her vision.

Folding screens were placed in the opposite direction of the window.

Overwhelmed by sleepiness, the only thing she could make out was that she was in a large room.

The feeling of warmth caused her eyes to suddenly feel heavy.

The teenage girl did not intend to fight against the desire to sleep and was just about to close her eyes— however at that instant, a low and deep voice came from behind the screens.

“Could you stay awake for a just while longer, (Fuyuhotaru)? I’ve got something to tell you.”

The teenage girl —Anmoto Shiika, widened her eyes which were about to close shut.

Her drowsiness seemed to have disappeared without a trace.

For some reason, she recognized who the owner of the voice was.

“(Kakkou)-kun….? — Ow.”

As Shiika tried to sit up, she felt a pain in the side of her torso. This pain caused

Shiika to remember all the incidents that occurred before she fainted.

Shiika was in the school that Daisuke and Rina were in, and collapsed from the serious wounds inflicted by SEPB's Mushitsuki.

The one who saved her was—

"Don't move about, you should be recuperating for the time being." Said a calm voice from behind the screen.

"(Kakkou)-kun…..I…."

Shiika held onto the screen that was blocking the both of them, intent on removing the screen due to impulse.

Yet, her hands suddenly stopped moving.

Shiika bit her lip, and lowered her head. If she were to see the figure of the boy, she would probably just break down into tears from the sudden relief of all the tension.

Shiika still held onto the screens, and forced a smile.

"(Kakkou)-kun….I've been trying my best, you know? I remembered my dream. I really did keep it…. The promise I made with you."

The hoarse voice that slipped out from between her lips was unable to mask the sound of her gradual sobbing. The teenage boy on the other side of the screen, probably thought Shiika was crying right?

"Mhm…."

Shiika could feel that his voice carried a bit of laughter in it.

"You really are strong."

The tears that she was holding back began to overflow. Shiika let go of the screen— the compliment from the boy she had met only once four years ago, made her so happy that even she found it unbelievable.

"On the other hand, I….."

The teenage boy's voice became even lower and deeper.

"You've also kept your promise, haven't you?"

Shiika said with a smile on her face.

“You’ve always held on to your dreams, I heard it from Rina.”

“But…I failed to protect Rina.”

A burning sensation pierced through Shiika’s chest.

Rina.

As Shiika had feared, Rina was—

“….It’s alright.”

Shiika was sobbing so much more than before that her words were almost inaudible.

“Rina’s dream had already imprinted deep into our hearts… I know that Rina’s real dream… was definitely the same as ours… …”

The teenage boy remained silent.

Silence surrounded the two who were divided by the screen.

Shiika and (Kakkou) were alone in this quiet space under the warmth of the sun. Shiika wished that it could remain like this forever.

"From now on, there will be other watchers from the SEPB following after you....."

“Mhm, I know….Isn’t it going to be (Kakkou)-kun?”

“I—“

He went silent after saying it halfway.

After a moment of silence, Daisuke continued with (Kakkou)’s voice: “A guy named Kusuriya Daisuke, left a message for you.”

“……!”

A pain surged across Shiika’s chest. It was different from the time when she heard (Kakkou)’s voice and Rina’s name; it was a tight pain in her chest.

Shiika was unable to keep her promise with Daisuke.

Goodbye—What should she do if those were the words Daisuke wanted to say

to her?

While Shiika was filled with unease in her heart, she also hoped for the result to be unexpected.

“The promise on Christmas—“

Shiika’s heart skipped a beat.

”I hope that you can wait till next year. There are some things that I still have to do… And I won’t be able to meet you until they’re settled—“

“……”

— I hope that you can wait till next year.

This time she really could not hold back anymore; and the unstoppable tears began to flow down from Shiika’s eyes.

“Mhm… Mhm… Thank you… …”

Shiika nodded in approval nonstop.

“I’ll definitely…… Definitely be there next year…….”

Shiika knew that Daisuke wasn‘t around, but she still said it.

The sound of the door closing came from behind the screens.

(Kakkou)’s presence disappeared from the ward.

“I’ll work harder…..Until then, I’ll definitely protect my own dream. That is why, Daisuke-kun…..and (Kakkou)-kun, and everybody else should too…….”

Next to the still crying Shiika, a pile of snow could be seen sliding off the rooftop from outside of the window.

The snow of yesterday evening, should probably melt by this afternoon right?

On the corner of the other bed, blocked by the screen, Shiika found a small red box that was wrapped with a small ribbon.

After receiving a small dream… Within the deepest part of Shiika’s heart, a faint sound rang weakly —

Afterwords

Hello everybody, Kyouhei Iwai here.

Continuing on from my debut work in December 2002, “The summoned challenger The King of perfection”, my second work “Mushi uta 01: The Dreaming Firefly” has successfully managed to be published.

How does everybody find this piece?

If everybody is able to enjoy it, that would be my greatest joy.

To create this piece, I have thought about how the plot progress should be.

Afterwards I realized, in my debut piece, most of the starring characters act based on reasoning, with a motive that they must act without being shaken.

Since it was like that, this time I decided to try portraying such a character — Being commanded by emotions that he himself is unsure of….he wants to do this, and desires to become like that…that kind of ambiguous personality. Due to a definite reason, that everybody is clear about, he has to remain resolute.

The end product is that the style of this piece has completely changed.

The characters that appear this time have personality’s that are not fully matured. I will concentrate on portraying their emotions, the feeling of wanting to come closer to what they desire.

On the other hand, the setting of bugs that feed on dreams, was in my “If I were to put what I truly like and truly hate in the same world together, what would happen?” notion that it was born.

This world is what I truly like most, that is the people who harbor dreams. The drive that allows them to live on, are the “Dreams”. If their dreams were taken away from them, what would be left?

The thing that I truly hate most in this world, are insects. Although I know that they too have life….but please Mr.Ant, please do not come into my apartment during the summer, alright? (to tell you the truth I myself have not confirmed it,

but the “Kakkou” mushi that appears inside the work; does it really exist? This almost seems to be an insect that came out of my imagination.)

Do you have a dream that belongs only to you? I have one, but, I have a feeling that if I were to say it out, a feeling of losing it will appear just like a lie, that’s why I guess I will just keep it to myself!

What do you hate then? Do you have the courage to overcome it?.....I think that I would still lose to the insects in the summer at the moment?

I believe that those people buying the book, should also have different kinds of dreams. The desire to do this, or the desire to become like this has no way of judging whether its good or bad. As long as one has a dream to accomplish, they would definitely be hurdles that need to be overcome. But, I want to cheer on from the bottom of my heart, those people who never give up, and continue to work hard to achieve it.

Credits

Mushi Uta - Volume 01. The Dreaming Firefly

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